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# Helen Alliston





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# HELEN ALLISTON



*By the same author*  
**ELIZABETH'S CHILDREN**

# HELEN ALLISTON

By  
Margaret Westrup  
(Mrs. W. Sidney Stacey)

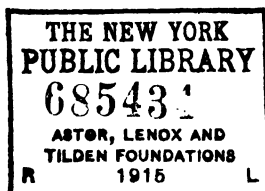


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*Come to me, O ye children!  
And whisper in my ear,  
What the birds and the winds are singing  
In your sunny atmosphere.*

**LONGFELLOW**





# HELEN ALLISTON

## CHAPTER I

### AT THORPE

WHEN Helen was about six years old, she said one day, "When I grow up I'll marry the nicest and the strongest man in all the world. And I'll take a whole bottle of senna-and-prunes every day all the whole year."

Mary McGregor shook her head. "What gars ye think of such a thing, Miss Helen?" she said.

The child's odd little face took on a queer earnestness then. There was a deep wistfulness in her voice as she answered, "It's so my children's father and mother won't die, you see."

Mary's long Scotch face expressed uncomprehending disapproval.

"And he'll be the *nicest* man in all the world, so's they'll have a *nice* father," she added earnestly.

"You get along wi' your sewing, Miss Helen, and dinna talk sae muckle."

Lilian, working sedately at her hem, said in her gentle little voice, "*My chillun will have me.*"

Helen's grey eyes darkened with feeling. "That's not anuff," she said in a queer, strenuous little way, and sighed heavily for the thoughts she could not express.

Her earliest religious difficulty was connected with her grandfather. She came out from church one Sunday morning with a scared look in her small face. On the way home she only spoke once. "Does," she said to Mary McGregor, — "does 'Honour your father and mother' mean '*grandfather*' too?"

"Yes," answered Mary, curtly.

## HELEN ALLISTON

She was very quiet all that day. At night she startled Lilian by suddenly starting up in bed. "When I die I'll go to hell," she said.

Lilian cowered beneath the bedclothes.

"Oh, don't! Oh!"

"Mary says 'Honour your father and mother' means 'grandfather' too; and I don't honour my grandfather," she went on in an even voice.

"Oh, you must! Oh, you're wicked!"

"I don't. Do you?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"'Honour' means aspect and love and think him *good* and *right always*;" the remorseless little voice was very clear, — "do you?"

Lilian was in tears.

"I *do* honour my father and mother, for your days shall be long in the land which the Lordy God giffeth thee," she protested volubly, "and my gran'father too! I do!"

"You can't." The white figure on the other bed was erect and inexorable. "He's not good, and you're afraid of him, like the devil."

Lilian's sobs grew pitiful.

Helen slipped to the floor and across the room.

"Don't cry," she entreated, and her voice choked. "Why do I always make you cry, dear — *dear* —"

"I don't want — you to go — to hell —"

"I don't want to either. It would be *dreadful*," with a shudder; "specially in summer. Don't cry —"

Lilian's fair little tear-stained face emerged from the bedclothes.

"I *do* honour my father and mother —"

"Mother and father's dead. It's easy to honour angels, even if they're only heads now."

"But I honour my grandfather too —"

"How do you?"

"Acause you have to. You do it too, Helen, else I'll cry again."

"Oh, don't cry — don't cry —" She stood shivering by the bedside till Lilian fell asleep. Then she crept back to her own bed, which had grown cold. In the dark, dread forms assembled and menaced her from the wardrobe and

wash-hand stand. They had long horns, and long thin arms stretched out towards her. She shook in an agony of fear. Once she called out, "God, I do honour my grandfather!" but added almost immediately, "No, God Almighty, I don't—I don't!" and the forms drew nearer. She clutched the bedclothes about her, and tried to say she did again; but her absolute truth would not be cheated; she knew she did not honour her grandfather. She could not go to sleep; she dared not shut her eyes; she knew if she did that they would come and carry her off to hell. She pictured the horrors of the "everlasting fire" till she lay rigid with terror, staring into the darkness.

After a real eternity to the child, Mary McGregor came into the room to fetch something. She lit the gas, and Helen, with a sudden gasping cry, sprang out of bed, and flung herself against the old woman. "I don't want to go to hell!" she whispered, "but I don't honour my grandfather!"

Deep down in the stern and narrow old woman's heart was a love for the child she could not understand,—greater, far, than the love she felt for Lilian. The whiteness of the piteous little face, the awful scared look in the eyes, hurt her. She picked the child up into her arms, and carried her into the big, bare nursery.

"Wha's wrang?" she said curtly.

"How can you honour your grandfather when he's a bad man—"

"That's not for you to say."

"But I don't honour him, Mary;" the bitter perplexity shrilled into a wail of utter woe.

Mary's face was wooden.

"Ye've got to," she said.

"I can't! Oh, I can't!"

"Ye're telt to dae it, and ye've got to, Miss Helen."

"But if you're to honour your grandfather, why does n't God give you a good one?"

"Ye've got to mak' the best o' what He sends ye."

"Will I go to hell if I don't, Mary?"

For an instant the old woman's stern principle faltered; then she said stonily, "Yes."

The terror in the child's face weakened her; she added

curtly, "Gin ye pray for a new and contrite speerit the Lord may help ye."

For the first time that day a ray of hope shone in Helen's eyes.

"I'll begin now," she cried earnestly; and, slipping to the floor, knelt at Mary's knee.

"Oh, Almighty God," — she prayed with a fervour that must have made the angel mother weep, — "give me a new anconrite spirit that will honour my grandfather, and my days will be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for ever and ever, world without end, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

She lifted an exhausted face to the lined countenance above her.

"I think God will send me the new anconrite spirit," she said in a tired voice, "don't you, Mary?"

"Gin ye pray hard enough, Miss Helen. Come to bed now."

The child was worn out; she fell asleep almost immediately. She had not mentioned to Mary the forms that menaced her. Lilian was often assailed with nervous terrors, and would run weeping to Helen and Mary. But Helen suffered in silence; she would have died rather than give voice to any with whom she came in contact. The large, gloomy house was full of terrifying corners, of dark patches of mysterious gloom. Sent sometimes on an errand upstairs at night, she suffered terrors at the corners of the staircase that made her in later life look at the dark places with repulsion. Gruesome beings tracked her up the stairs; she could hear, in the buzzing stillness of the house, their footsteps padding behind her; sometimes she felt their breath on her legs. She never ran; she walked very stiffly up the stairs, and suffered an agony at every step. The house was very empty; there was no one in it now but the two children, the grandfather, and Mary McGregor.

There had been Allistons of Thorpe for centuries; but the family had dwindled till it comprised only the three who lived in the gloomy grey house amongst the beech-trees and a few distant cousins, with all of whom Godfrey Alliston had quarrelled years since. He had quarrelled with the county too, and at seventy lived in his study, work-

ing out mathematical problems. He was a soured and embittered old man; a latent taciturnity grew on him; he would hold no intercourse with any one. In all his life he had only had one deep affection, and that had been for his only son, — the father of Helen and Lilian. And his son had disappointed him; he had plunged Thorpe into debt, and had married a beautiful, penniless girl, in defiance of his father's command that he should wed a certain heiress, whose money would have reinstated Thorpe. A few years later he had died, and Godfrey Alliston allowed his young wife and two babies to come beneath his roof. She was delicate and timid, and people said his treatment of her killed her. She died within a year of her coming to Thorpe.

He never would have anything to do with her children. He was deeply resentful of the fact that they were girls, and they reminded him of their mother. They were terrified of the long, lean old man they met sometimes in a corridor, or in the grounds; they ran when they saw him approaching. From babyhood they had been brought up largely on injunctions to keep out of their grandfather's way; not to do this, that, or the other for fear of disturbing him; to creep up the stairs, never to go near the study. From an indiscreet cook they had heard scraps of scandal on the way he had treated their mother. To them he was an ogre who added a hundredfold to the terrors of the gloomy old house amongst the beech-trees.

While they were still only a few years old, the household had dwindled till only Mary McGregor stayed on as retainer. Mary had no affection for her master, but she had an odd, sour loyalty towards him as the head of the Allistons. She would listen to no word against him; she never sympathised, at any rate openly, with his grandchildren's terror of him. Also she never guessed how deep that terror was on Helen's part. She did not understand the child's mind, which was imaginative and creative; she did not understand the reserve and pride that would not let the child give voice to her fears.

Apart from the subject of her grandfather, Helen created so realistically that she awed and frightened Lilian. Often in the middle of a game Lilian would stop suddenly,

and tremblingly exclaim, "We're only *pretending*, Helen, are n't we?"

Helen, brought back suddenly to reality, which in this case was grey and dull, with no wonderful light and colour such as the realms of imagination possessed, would turn on her sister angrily, and refuse to go on. But always Lilian's tears melted her, and she went on with, for a while, all the glamour gone, till her imagination triumphed over the interruption.

To her the dolls must be real or they must be nothing. She could not sit, as Lilian did, and hush her doll to sleep with a song, interspersed with remarks about the wax of her face getting dirty, or the tips of her fingers being chipped. Once when Viola Maude was very ill, and the doctors and nurses were afraid she would die, and the mother, nearly fainting from want of sleep and food, the doctor (Helen personated all the characters save the child, and an aunt, the latter being an insignificant part taken by Lilian) exclaimed, "A bath is a risk! But it is a matter of life and death. Mrs. Walden, we will risk it!" and Lilian, in terror, interposed in a frantic whisper, "You won't *really*, Helen! All the sawdust will come out!"

The collapse of Helen was pitiable; she refused to go on with the game.

Till they were respectively six and seven years old, Mary McGregor undertook their education. Then the rector, urged on by his wife, bearded Mr. Alliston, and tried to make him realise that he had duties to perform with regard to his grandchildren. The rector did not enjoy the visit; he was a timid man, and Mr. Alliston's attitude was disconcerting from the beginning of the interview. However, it had a small result, in the shape of Miss Flickers, a genteel maiden lady, who undertook to teach the Misses Alliston all that she considered necessary in letters and deportment, for the sum of ten pounds a year. She came to Thorpe every morning at ten o'clock, and she crept through its solemn inhospitable portals with her little bob curls quivering with nervous apprehension. Her methods were old-fashioned and often ludicrous.

Helen's sense of humour, though so lamentably ill-nourished, was very keen. She laughed at little Miss

Flickers, but she took care of her too. Miss Flickers taught them never to ask for anything at table, and tried to inculcate an elegant languidness over food.

"If you go to a tea-party, my dears, take one slice of bread and butter without any pressing. When the plate is handed to you again, decline gracefully, and be firm. You will then be handed cake; decline that also, but after due pressing accept a small piece with some graceful little remark, such as, 'Well, really, Mrs. So-and-So, as you are so *very* pressing —'"

"And what," asked Helen, much interested, "do you do the *next* time?"

"Oh, my dear, you must never take more than the one slice, and the one piece of cake."

"But suppose you *want* more?"

"No matter; it is not elegant manners to take more. If you feel faint when you return home, you can have something then."

The children imbibed it all, much puzzled. Helen asked questions which disconcerted Miss Flickers, who took refuge in a gently reproving "That's not a genteel subject for young ladies, my dear."

She taught them to do crewel-work and to embroider. Lilian took to such work readily, but to Helen it was torture. She argued it out once with Miss Flickers. "Why should I do it? It's no good, and it's hideous."

Miss Flickers shed a gentle tear over such heresy. "Do you call my parlour hideous?" she asked tremulously.

They had been taken to Miss Flickers' home as a great treat. Another Miss Flickers lived there too, — an older, more wrinkled Miss Flickers. Helen was innately truthful; prevarication, underhandedness, meanness, cheating, roused her wrath as nothing else could, save cruelty to children and animals.

She did think Miss Flickers' parlour hideous, yet she loved Miss Flickers, and was very sensitive about hurting any one's feelings. The red surged up slowly into her face; it burned her very neck, tears came into her eyes. Then she did what was typical of her in after life. She told no untruth, but she poured balm on the wounded sensibility. She flung her small arms about Miss Flickers'



thin little neck. "Don't look sad — oh, I love you," she cried. And Miss Flickers blushed with pleasure, and forgot all about her parlour.

But Helen was a sore trouble and perplexity to her at times. There were the days when a quiet Helen would come to her — "I read in the Library yesterday."

Punishment had to follow this statement. Often it took a form the child loathed, — hems and hems and hems. She plodded through them silently, leaving a painful track of red dots behind her needle, growing weary and heavy-eyed, her small mouth shut tight, giving an odd firmness to such a young face.

Miss Flickers' course of reading comprised "The Pilgrim's Progress"; "Sandford and Merton"; "Moral Treasures for the Young"; "Sermons for Young Minds"; "Matilda, a Story with a Moral"; "The Elegancies of Life"; and, of course, the Bible, and Grammar, and Geography, History, and Arithmetic books.

On these Helen would starve for a few weeks; then there would come a day when she would walk slowly to the forbidden library, emerging later on with a flushed face and shining eyes; and the next morning — "I read in the Library yesterday" — and hems, hems, hems.

In those visits she imbibed a queer collection of facts and fancies, — some wholly incomprehensible, some half so, and some understood.

"When you love a person you write verses to her eye-lash," she told Lilian. And she wrote verses herself at the age of seven. Years afterwards she came across some fragments of paper, — pieces torn from exercise books chiefly, — scrawled over with the eager, irregular writing. She was fifteen then, too young to be merely amused at the verses, too old to think them worth keeping for any other reason. So she tore them up. The fragments she found were few — one, unfinished, was a tragedy.

"Scene. A marbel hall strune with rich Oriental rugs, status, cushions, and fountanes.

"Dramatis Personæ. Ye Ladye Sybil and ye Maide Sarah.

"Ye Ladye Sybil taring her long raven lox. 'I tell thee murder is in my heart. This night shalt murder be done, and these two lily hands shall do the murder.'

## AT THORPE

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"Her Maide. 'Ah, hyness, paws!'

"Ye Ladye Sybil. 'Cease vessel! Look out at yonder black sky, see how it lowers over the dull grey land. That sky is my soul. Ah Fredrick once thou lovest my smailest curl, now you slite me! Now you sing odes to my ladye Isobels eyelash. This night she shalt perish, with these to lily hands wilt I slay her. Prithy will thy love turn to me again then my Fredrick.'

"Her Maide. 'Ah hyness paws.'

"Ye Ladye Sybil. 'For what should I paws, impudent vessel you too shalt perish if ye are not careful.'"

The tragedy came to an abrupt close there. On the other side of the paper was "An ode to a frekle."

"Oh, sweet little frekle of brown  
Throned on thy lip like a crown  
Tell me prithy what thy mistres think  
Is my heart to rise or sink?

"Little frekle so near her swet lip  
Tell me wilt I be allowed to sip  
Nectar from her as from a rose  
And sheald her always from all her foes?"

On the back of a circular advertising somebody's soap were verses that, when she wrote them, brought an insupportable ache to her heart.

"Oh, cold grey skies  
Oh, lonely heart  
Sad are my eyes  
For we must part.

Cruel destiny discrees it so  
The world is cold and grey  
Ah, the cup of bitter woe  
I drink this awful day.

"Oh, violets asleep  
Oh, primroses dead  
Will you never more peep  
From your earthy bed?

"For me the flowers bloom no more  
My love is white and dead  
A bitter greif my heart doth gnaw  
A pain doth rack my head."

Finally there was a story, — a gloomy, sad story, with ghosts and horrors creeping about a dark old house, menacing two princesses, that made Lilian shriek with terror, and gave Helen nightmare.

In and out her mind during those young years another story wound. It never ended; she never attempted to write it down. She would tell portions to Lilian sometimes, but much of it was vague and too precious to be spoken of. It concerned a young girl named Cynthia, the eldest of a family who adored her. She petted and loved the children; the children petted and loved her. Her father and mother petted and loved her; she looked after them; put her father's slippers to warm; fetched her mother's shawl when she went into the garden. They lived in a little red-brick house with pots of flowers in all the windows, and white muslin curtains tied back with pink ribbons. There was generally some one sick whom Cynthia tended.

Violets, daffodils, primroses, bluebells, bloomed in a never-ending luxuriance in a little wood close by, where the sunlight flickered through cool, green leaves. Cynthia spent much of her time in the library, — the largest room in the house, — reading books with a baby in her lap. Her mother said, "My darling, what should we do without you?" And all the family echoed the sentiment. Her father and brothers escorted her everywhere; guarded her, loved her, looked after her. Such was the outline of the story which went on and on, never-ending, through so many years of her lonely childhood.

When she was fifteen she began to write a novel. She lived in it awhile. Lilian thought it beautiful.

But one day — it was a glorious morning in October — she and Lilian went out. The air was bright, crisp, inspiring; full of gleams of Autumn riches — reds, yellows, browns — a million different shades. And Helen walked in silence, realising her own inadequacy. Then she said:

"I shall burn 'The Lost Letter.'"

And Lilian expostulated in vain; the doom of the novel was sealed by the beauty of that October day.

It was on the same day that Augustus Fairholme came into their lives. He was heralded by a fox, — a poor little

panting thing that slithered past them, turned to the left and disappeared when the hunt swung into sight.

Helen's face grew defiant.

The huntsman rode up to the stile on which she and Lilian sat, and, doffing his hat, inquired if they had seen the fox — the hounds had lost the scent.

Helen answered "Yes."

The huntsman waited with unconcealed impatience. Helen eyed him calmly, but her fingers broke the dead twig she held with sharp little snaps.

She refused to tell which way the fox had gone. She held her head erect. "I like fair play," she said.

The huntsman was angry, but not as angry as he might have been. Even then there was that charm about her that disarms men, though she was nothing but a long-limbed schoolgirl.

He appealed to Lilian.

Helen looked at her, and dared her to tell. Lilian blushed painfully, and shrank back behind her.

Augustus Fairholme rode forward, prepared to persuade Helen.

"Come, now," he said gently, his pale face bent towards her, "you will not be so unkind as to refuse to help me?"

Helen looked straight into his face.

"He went that way," she said, pointing to the right.

He thanked her with a bow and a complacent smile. The huntsman frowned ungratefully, and took the hounds forward in the direction indicated.

After they had gone there was a queer silence between the two on the stile. Helen sat swinging her hat by its bow of ribbon. Suddenly Lilian burst into tears. In an instant Helen had turned and clasped the slight figure in her arms. But Lilian jerked herself away. An odd little hurt look darkened Helen's eyes. "So you think I'm as bad as that," she said.

"Yes, I do! I do! It was a *lie*! And he looked so pleading — and he was so handsome — and so pale — oh, I can't think how you *could*, Helen!"

Helen looked thoughtfully out over the pearl-misted landscape.

"I was n't going to do it," she said slowly. "I was n't going to tell the lie, till he spoke to me —"

"But — but I don't see how you *could* — oh, I don't! I don't! It's so wicked and horrid — and unkind —"

"It's kind to the fox anyway."

Lilian wiped her eyes, and confronted her with pink-deepened cheeks.

"The fox! It deserves to be killed! It steals and —"

"If it has to be killed, at least let it have fair play, Lilian. It is *n't* fair to ask me like that. Each side ought to take all chances. Did you notice what a perfect shape that chestnut of the huntsman's was, Lil?" she added; "but I liked that little bay mare's head best of all. Oh, if only we could have a horse — even one between us!"

But Lilian was not so amenable as usual; they walked home in silence; Lilian's fair, childish face looked almost sulky. Helen suffered under her disapproval. She loved Lilian with all the strength of a strong nature with too little on which to expend its strength of love. The deep instinct in her which was so keenly alive to anything young and helpless, or anything in trouble or pain, was called forth by Lilian's weaker nature. Though only a year older, Helen had always mothered her.

Augustus Fairholme came back to the neighbouring county for the hunting next year. He remembered, one morning, the pale, tall girl who, as he incredulously suspected, had wilfully misdirected him. He lay back, after his breakfast, in a lounge chair, and smoked a cigarette, and thought of the matter. He had thought of it a good many times since that October morning. In a way he was not ill-pleased, for that pale, tall girl had provided him with a new sensation; she had actually incited him to curiosity; she had surprised him utterly. He had never thought a girl could wilfully misdirect him.

On a non-hunting day he rode over to Thorpewold. He was not particularly keen about the matter, but he was fond of pursuing a course to the point where it might need exertion on his part, and of leaving the rest to the Fates. The Fates generally finished the matter for him as he would have wished. In this case they were not so kind as their usual wont. They began well by sending Helen and Lilian

across his path. But as time went on Helen's coldness worried him. It was new to him — young, good-looking, wealthy — to meet with such coldness. True, Lilian's welcome was always shy and sweet; she made eager excuses for her sister's coldness, but Augustus was ungrateful. He went away. But still Helen's pale, beautiful face troubled him. He came back, and asked her to marry him; he asked her very gently, so as not to overwhelm her.

She was very patient over his persistent non-understanding of her refusal to be his wife. His love for her softened her, made her very gentle. But she shrank from his avowal of it. When he grew passionate she shivered coldly. He understood at last, and left her.

Then Godfrey Alliston died, and left his affairs in a terrible confusion. His niece and her husband came to Thorpe.

Helen, watching them drive up in the station fly, warned Lilian. "Cousin Laura will find fault with everything — including us. I see it in her nostril."

And Mrs. Stevenson was ludicrously true to that nostril.

At the end of a few days, Helen declared that her head was cracked all over. "It's full of sharp little splits, Lil, like fireworks. There's a buzz in my ears. When I shut my eyes a huge note of interrogation dangles before them."

After months of weary settlings-up, paying of debts, talks with the lawyers, wrangling and worry, affairs were finally settled.

Thorpe, mortgaged heavily, going to rack and ruin, went to a cousin Hervey in South Africa. Helen and Lilian were brought face to face with the uncompromising truth that they would have to set to work to earn money somehow.

Mrs. Stevenson prided herself on being practical, which meant that she pursued a consistent course of ignoring other people's susceptibilities and feelings.

"You will have to do something, of course. The pittance your Grandfather has left you will, at a pinch, keep you about a year. I'm sure I am willing to help in any way I can — find you something to do; but really, nowadays people require such a sheaf of certificates — What you will do I cannot imagine. No education! No experience! —"

CHAPTER II

IN LONDON

**F**INALLY it was decided that Mary McGregor should accompany her "young leddies" to London.

Mary had a cousin who had once stayed with a certain Mrs. Greaves, at No. 32 Gilroy Street. Mrs. Greaves let lodgings; so Mary journeyed to town alone on a visit of stern inspection, wherein the very mattresses of the beds were investigated; chests of drawers moved out in search of lurking dust; and a visit was paid to the kitchen. After which Mary took the rooms.

Helen was excited, full of eager hope. After much inward debating she had decided to try literature as a profession. She was very diffident about it, but the longing to write — write — that was within her, would make itself heard. She had a little money. Surely it must be right to let herself just try!

So she came to London. She went straight to a stationer's and bought five quires of beautiful spotless Cambridge paper and four sheets of pink blotting paper. She took them to the modest sitting-room at No. 32 Gilroy Street, and sat before them at the table in a dream of bliss. She handled them lovingly; her writing hitherto had been done on odd pieces of paper, in old exercise books. Now it was going to be her profession!

"Lilian," she turned to her with shining eyes, "is n't it beautiful paper?"

Lilian came across the room and looked at it surprised.

Helen wrote "Chapter I" with slow delight; she had never been so happy in her life as she was at that moment.

"Oh, Lil, I feel I shall do things! I feel — oh —" She stretched out her arms. "I never knew what a beautiful world it is!"

Lilian looked out at the dusty little street.

"I think London's horrid, and I shall never dare go out; the noise is awful."

"You will get used to it, Lil." Helen's tone was soberer. "It's a great, busy world. Thorpewold was never busy."

## IN LONDON

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One could not laze in London, one must work — do things — I have a story here — ” she tapped her brow.

It was a beautiful brow, that looked as if it might have things worth the telling behind it.

Very soon after their coming to London Mary McGregor had, sorely against her will, to leave them. Her brother's wife had died and left him with a family of young children. He besought Mary to come and live with them in Glasgow. So she went.

Those were anxious weeks for Helen that followed. Lilian's pink cheeks faded a little in London; she hated the life — was full of nervous forebodings.

Helen wrote feverishly. She seemed to live waiting for the postman's knock. She was tenderly encouraging over the water-colour cards Lilian painted with laborious care, but she knew no one would buy them. She knew that if her stories were not accepted she and Lilian would be obliged to seek for posts as companions or governesses. She refused to be daunted; she went bravely on, cheerful and comforting. She gloried in a flattering letter from the editor of "The Monthly Magazine," who regretted not being able, through lack of space, to accept any of her work at present, but added that he would be glad to consider it later on, if she cared to submit some stories to him again. Some time later another editor, also overcrowded, alluded to her stories as "charming and original."

On such meagre fare she strove to keep up her own and Lilian's feelings.

Then one day Lilian met Augustus Fairholme. From the minute she came in, pink-cheeked, bright-eyed, it all seemed inevitable. Augustus was soothed by her innocent admiration, her shy smiles, her eager welcome. Short of telling her of his proposal to herself, Helen did all she could to prevent the marriage. And then when Lilian came to her, blushing, tearful, radiant, and told her Augustus had asked her to marry him, she realised suddenly, acutely, that it was well. The realisation hurt her, but it was clear and strong. In the days that followed, the realisation never grew dim. They were days of bustle, shopping, choosing furniture, carpets, wall-papers for the handsome flat Augustus had decided upon, — days annotated with praises



## HELEN ALLISTON

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of Augustus and modest disparagements of herself, from Lilian, and filled with entreatings and urgings from both of them to Helen to make her home with them.

Her cherished plan of living on in Gilroy Street and writing till her small stock of money should give out, and then, if she had earned no more, seeking some post, had to be abandoned. Augustus thought it most unsuitable, and Lilian wept and declared the prospect of Helen's living alone made her miserable. So in despair and weariness Helen descended to "a paying guest." It was settled at last at that. She bore patiently with Lilian's reproaches anent her preferring to live with strangers.

She advertised in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Post*. She received a good many answers. Musing over them sadly, it struck her as comical that she should have come so low as a paying guest; she had always hated the idea. The unattractiveness of the answers she received did not incline her to alter her mind. She called on the writer of one of the answers, and found her so absurdly like her letter that she felt inclined to laugh. She was a stout British matron in black, with a great deal of jet about her, and possessed of a high brow, on top of which a massive cap reposed. Her voice was monotonous. She discoursed principally upon the delinquencies of various servants of hers, and of the doings of her neighbours, who lived on either side, and opposite, in houses exactly like her own.

Helen drew a deep breath when she found herself safely beyond the respectable precincts of that terrace.

A week after the insertion of her advertisement she received another letter. It was different from the others somehow. It wore a rakish look; the stamp was stuck on upside down and crooked, and had very palpably been adjusted with pencilly fingers; the envelope did not match the paper inside it; the writing was black, erratic, and not altogether innocent of smudges. She felt a relief steal over her as she looked upon it. The letter was brief; it merely stated that the writer was anxious to have a paying guest, and would do her best to make her visitor happy, once she had found out what the visitor would like. She signed herself "Pauline Derrington," and added a smudgy

"P. S. The situation is not aristocratic, but it is very healthy, and we have a glorious view of the sunsets from the 'Red Cottage.'"

That postscript appealed to Helen almost as strongly as the clause about her happiness, which showed, she thought, a rare consideration on the writer's part. The others had all been so complacently sure she must be happy in their homes; none had dreamt her tastes could have any originality of their own.

So, in the rush of Lilian's approaching marriage, dreading another visit and a consequent disillusion, she wrote recklessly off to the "Red Cottage," agreeing to the terms and stating day of arrival.

A storm of horror, of expostulations, followed. Mrs. Stevenson observed, "It's in a suburb in the north of London! And you are going without even inspecting the place, much less the people! Oh, well, I always said poor Uncle Godfrey was not right in his head!"

Helen took the suggestion made so delicately; her eyes twinkled.

After the wedding Lilian and Augustus went to the Riviera for five weeks. When they returned to the flat, Helen was there to receive them.

At the sight of Lilian she felt a great thankfulness; her anxieties fled from her. She also felt a great wonder.

They spent a quiet Christmas at the flat. Augustus as a husband was perfect; his manner expressed a delicate sense of proprietorship in Lilian. His air said gracefully, "Have I not chosen well? Is she not charming? She is mine."

Lilian poured out an ecstasy of happiness to Helen. Every sentence began with Augustus and ended with Augustus.

Augustus dispensed his hospitality to her with evident enjoyment; he was very kind, very amiable and affectionate. She chid herself for not being able to like him more. She told herself that the wild rush of indignation she felt when he called her "My dear" was absurd. The temptation to make fun of him was almost irresistible. He was so beautifully oblivious of the fact that it could ever be possible for any one to laugh at him. Lilian shared his oblivion.

For her sake Helen struggled valiantly against the temptation. And there was no one to understand the quizzical glint in her eye.

A few days after Christmas she packed with a sense of relief. Much as she dreaded the plunge into a household of strangers, and terrible as it seemed to her that she should be glad to leave Lilian, yet she was relieved to go.

### CHAPTER III

#### IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

**A**FTER a wearisome journey by train, with bewildering changes and numerous waitings on draughty platforms, Helen found herself at last in an antediluvian, four-wheeled cab, being driven to the "Red Cottage." It was a bitterly cold day; flecks of powdery snow touched the windows softly. She felt cold within and without. Fears assailed her as she jolted along.

"I hope — I *hope* she won't be covered with jet!"

She remembered the dirty stamp and took heart. "Artistic, I'm sure," she murmured; "pencilly fingers stamped that envelope. Pencils and jet are incongruous, thank goodness."

She clutched the window-sash at an extra jolt, and laughed. "I hope they won't be looking out of the window — it's so terribly undignified to arrive bobbing up and down — oh!"

Presently another fear assailed her.

"I wonder if Art and Curiosity are incongruous, too? If she should be inquisitive! My poor, rejected manuscripts! The postman's awful, indelicate double knocks!"

She looked out in startled amusement.

"We're getting into the wilds, and they are in the being-civilised state."

All around her were sad-looking fields, churned up into knobby clay, with here and there eloquent tufts of drooping, muddy grass. Bricks, tin kettles, rubbish, adorned them;

## IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

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a row of open-eyed, aggressively red little houses stood staring in prim disapproval at their surroundings; other rows, in a more or less finished state, appeared at intervals.

The cabman shouted huskily, "You said Hampden Road, did n't you, Miss?"

"Yes."

"Well, this is Hampden Road, sure nuff; but I don't see no inhabited 'ouses."

Helen's eyes opened wide. "*This* a road!" She looked out at the churned-up clay the horse was ploughing through.

They went on slowly; presently here and there a solitary house appeared; there was even a new little occupied terrace. Deep was cabby's disappointment when he found that the "Red Cottage" was not amongst them.

"They're red," Helen heard him grumble; "what more d' you want?"

After a while they came to a low, dull, red house, with ivy twisting about its walls. It lay well back from the road, and in front of it there was a small turfed garden, with a gravel path in the centre leading from the gate to the front door.

Helen peered from the cab window in vain for some sign of its name. The cabman peered too. A labourer coming along just then, the cabman accosted him, "Hi! S'pose that there 'ouse is the 'Red Cottage,' seeing as it's not 'alf as red as all the other 'ouses, eh?"

"The wilds have made him sarcastic," Helen murmured appreciatively.

He was right; it was the "Red Cottage."

She alighted; she pushed open the latchless gate, and walked up the little gravel path. The door-bell hung forlornly, so she knocked only. Inside she could hear queer noises; rushes, scamperings, scurryings — then silence.

She waited; something drew her gaze upwards; from a window above hung heads and heads and heads, — yellow, brown, flaxen.

"Driver," she called, "are you sure this is the 'Red Cottage'?"

"Yes, Miss; shall I come and knock 'em up for you?" he asked, depositing a box in the road.

"No, thank you." She turned and knocked again, wondering if the place were a kindergarten.

She glanced up at the window once more; the heads, cautiously re-emerging, were hastily withdrawn; she heard a resounding thwack.

"Oh, poor head!"

The door was opened with a hurried little clatter. "Oh, I'm so sorry we kept you waiting," a breathless voice exclaimed, "but Bunny fell into the wash-tub, and I got so wet fishing him out, that I had to change. Do come in; you must be frozen. Are your boxes outside?"

Helen entered a wide, shabby-looking hall. There was a beautiful palm in a stand, with a doll lying on the mould. Another doll—an armless and legless doll—lay on the hat-stand; at the foot of the stairs there was a coloured ball, a book, and a piece of india rubber.

"The cabman is bringing in my boxes," she said, longing to ask if this *were* a kindergarten.

As she spoke she glanced up the stairs; there were the heads—yellow, brown, flaxen—hanging over the balusters.

Pauline Derrington was pushing the ball and the book out of sight with her foot. Helen smiled.

"The first floor—to the right," Mrs. Derrington said to the cabman.

When he had deposited the luggage, been paid, and had driven off, she asked Helen to follow her, and she would show her her room.

"I daresay you will like to go to bed," she said, "when you have washed. Would you like your tea before—"

"But," Helen exclaimed, "it is only six o'clock!"

"Yes. Oh, I always go to bed and read a novel when I've been travelling," she laughed, her little dark head on one side.

She made Helen think of a bird. She was a slim little dark woman, with vivacious manners, and a taking expression.

Helen followed her to her room. It was a shabby little room with a large bay window; the carpet was almost patternless, the wall-paper faded. But in front of the toilet-table and beside the bed were bright-hued little rugs; on the table there was a jar of yellow jonquills; the white

## IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

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and yellow curtains gave the effect of sunlight ; there were yellow cushions in the big old chair by the window. The room was bright with firelight, and sweet with the scent of the jonquils.

Helen turned impulsively to her hostess.

"How bright and cosy !" she exclaimed, with her charming smile.

"Do you like it ?" Pauline Derrington's face broke into delighted smiles. "It's small, but you get the sunsets from here — Would you like some hot water ? I'll send it at once."

Helen went across to the jonquils and buried her nose in them.

"I like her ; and she has n't a bit of jet about her !"

There was a tap on the door, and a thin, demure little brown maiden entered, carrying a jug of hot water.

"How-do-you-do ? I'm Philippa."

"Thanks, dear ; put it down there."

She put it down.

"Sha'n't I pour it out for you ?" she asked. "It leaks, you see."

Helen's eyes twinkled.

"Perhaps you had better, then."

"You won't want it too hot, will you ? It brings wrinkles, Hesky says, if you have it too hot."

"I'll have it just warm, then, please."

Philippa poured it out carefully. When she went to lift the ewer, Helen interposed. "I'll pour the cold water out when I want it, thank you."

"All right. Hesky's getting your tea ready now ; she burnt the toast on purpose, so mother's making some fresh. Do you like those rugs, Miss Alliston ?"

"Very much."

"You must n't look underneath, because there's holes. Mother bought the rugs to hide them."

Another tap on the door.

"Come in !"

"I believe it's that Bubbles," Philippa ejaculated.

Round the door he came, — a slim, angelic little fellow, blue-eyed, flaxen-haired.

"I *knew* it was !" Philippa exclaimed indignantly.

"I'm Bubbles. You're Miss Alliston, the paying guest. How-do-you-do?"

"Dad called him Bubbles, because he's just like a picture Millais painted," Philippa explained.

"I know," Helen said, — "a little boy blowing bubbles; he's exact."

"I don't care," Bubbles responded to sundry grimaces and motionings on Philippa's part, "you should n't have stopped so long, and I want to see if I can't do anything for her —"

"Oh, fibs! You said you'd never come near her!"

"That was before I'd seen her," calmly. "A gentleman always does things for ladies —"

"Well, you might bring my bag across to the window for me; will you?" Helen put in tactfully.

Bubbles put out a triumphant tongue at Philippa, and obeyed with a seraphic smile.

There was another tap on the door, and in came a fat little yellow-haired creature with such dimples and such a wide, fascinating smile, that Helen went down on her knees and kissed her.

"She's Peggy," said Pip in her rôle of show-woman. "Sometimes dad calls her 'Peggy of the Roly-polies,' — that's her legs, you know."

"I shall call her Peggy of the Golden Locks," Helen said.

Peggy beamed as if she had said something most exquisitely funny.

"Dulcie wants to clome in, too," she said.

"Come in, Dulcie!" Helen called.

There was no response.

"You see," Pip explained, "we've never had a paying-guest before. It's rather exciting, not knowing a bit what you'd be like, and Dulcie's rather shy —"

"Hesky said you'd be a born-fusser-never-sat'sfied — will you?" Bubbles asked.

"I hope not. Come in, Dulcie; I'm really not a bogey."

A little brown silky head came half round the door, then disappeared. Peggy gurgled with mirth. Philippa and Bubbles watched with much interest.

Helen went to the door; she pulled it open, then gave a gasp. Outside on the landing stood three more of them,

## IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

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— Dulcie, the shy; a wide, little, fat, brown fellow with a solemn gaze, and a yellow-haired baby, sucking a Punchinello.

"Oh, dear, you ought n't to suck that," Helen exclaimed anxiously; "the paint comes off."

"He always sucks everything," Philippa explained from the background. "He's the Cherub, and that's Bunny, and that's Dulcie."

Dulcie's little head, with its short hair, quite smooth, and curling up at the ends, fascinated Helen. She bent and kissed the small face beneath it.

Bunny drew back behind the Cherub, and his face grew war-like.

Helen gravely extended her hand to him. Immediately he wriggled in a sudden agony of shyness, his brown lashes on his fat red cheeks, his brown fists twisting at his overall. Helen, in mercy, turned to the Cherub, and catching him up in her arms, kissed his pink cheek. He thrust the Punchinello into her face with the utmost good-will. "Eat?" he said amiably.

She declined with thanks.

"Philippa," she said, "who are you all?"

"Us?" Philippa queried; "we're the Derrys."

At that moment Pauline Derrington appeared on the landing. "I thought so! Oh, Derrys, and I *told* you not to worry Miss Alliston —"

"They have n't worried me," Helen broke in. "I've been introduced to all of them."

"Down you go!" Mrs. Derrington hustled them down the stairs, carrying off the Cherub herself.

Helen watched with laughing eyes. She called out when Bunny tripped, and went rolling down to the hall; but no one took any notice, and he picked himself up at the foot of the stairs, in a matter-of-fact sort of way that struck her as irresistibly funny.

When she emerged from her room and went downstairs she saw an open door, and her hostess standing by a tea-table, so she went in.

"Oh, come in. I do hope you're hungry. Do you like muffins and crumpets? We dine at eight, more or less; but I thought you would be hungry after your journey —"



Presently Helen mentioned the children.

"I suppose some are cousins?" she said.

Mrs. Derrington's black eyebrows rose.

"I'm afraid they're all mine," she said deprecatingly.

"Oh! Oh, I beg your pardon — you look so young —"

"It's all that Jem! He's my husband, you know, and he ran away with me from school — I was only just seventeen — oh, there *was* such a fuss! But it was so deadly dull and prim at school, and my aunts — I had n't any parents — were duller and primmer still; and it seemed so romantic and such fun — do have some jam — I made it myself — *can* you taste anything funny in it? No? Really? Because Bubbles put some salt in when I was making it —"

Presently she said, "They're dears — I did n't mention them when I wrote to you, because I thought they might very probably put you off, and," ingenuously, "I knew it would be all right when you *saw* them."

"They're charming," Helen said, "and there's so much variety."

"Yes; it's more interesting, don't you think, than if they were all alike?"

"Oh, much."

"Don't let them worry you, will you? Just bundle them off; they're very good-tempered. And there's a dog too — an Irish wolfhound. Do you like dogs?" anxiously.

"Yes," Helen said earnestly.

"You'll love Stentor then. We called him that because he howled so all through the first night we had him, when he was a puppy. Oh, his voice was stentorian! He's a perfect chaperon for the Derrys. He has been shut out in the garden since you came, in case you were nervous."

Helen laughed. "I'm not, I assure you. I'm so glad he's a big dog; I like them better than little ones. Can't I see him now?"

"Oh, yes; he'll be injured. He can't bear to be alone." She went to the door, opened it — "Oh, there you are, Derrys. Fetch Stentor, pets."

"You don't mind one or two Derrys with him, do you?" she asked.

"Oh, no; let me have all of them."

Pauline's dark little face beamed.

## IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

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"They've soon conquered you."

"Each one did, as he or she came into my room."

"Of course I think they're irresistible; but then mothers always think that, I suppose."

The door was pushed open; a procession of Derrys came in, surrounding a beautiful, great fawn hound.

"Oh," Helen exclaimed, "if I could paint!"

"Stentor Derrington — Miss Alliston," declaimed Pip.

"Shake hands, Stentor!" urged Bubbles.

The dog came majestically up to Helen, and waved an indifferent paw in her direction. She took it — "What a beautiful foot!" She stroked his head; slowly his tail began to move to and fro. A shriek of delight arose from the Derrys.

"He likes you! Look at his tail! It's getting quicker and quicker!"

Stentor sat him down with a majestic deliberation, and solemnly presented her with his paw. He did it over and over again, making wild, amiable, and always dignified, dabs at her with it.

"You can see he knows you're not a burglar or a tramp or a suspicious character, can't you?" Pip queried earnestly.

"He loves you at once," Dulcie said, in her soft little voice.

Later on when Helen, in a long black voile gown that she had had made lately for evening wear, left her room to go down to dinner, a figure clad airily in a white shirt and one shoe flitted up the corridor to her. It was Bubbles.

"Miss Alliston, will you wear this?" he held out a half-dead yellow chrysanthemum.

"Thank you, Bubbles." She tucked it into the soft silk belt at her waist. As she raised her head she caught sight of another small figure peeping shyly forth from the shadows cast by an old oak cupboard.

"Is it you, Dulcie?"

Dulcie, in a pair of little red stays, and a very short white flannel petticoat, ran out to her.

"Oh, aren't you '*doriful*'?" she ejaculated earnestly.

"Oh, how *graciously* beautiful you are!"

She laughed. "Oh, you bad little flatterer. Don't you know what happened to the princess whom every one

flattered? Why, she grew so puffed up that at last she was all puffings, and one day the wind blew, and — puff! — the princess had blown away — away — and that was the last of *her*. Are you trying to make me so light that I shall be blown away from the ‘Red Cottage,’ Dulcie?”

“If you did,” Dulcie said earnestly, “I’d make every one flatter *me* — till I grew all puffings, and then I’d blow away after you — till I found you again!”

“There’s a song dad sings called ‘Queen of the Night,’” Bubbles observed, “and it’s you, is n’t it, Miss Alliston?”

She laughed, bade them good-night, and hurried down the stairs. Bubbles shot down to her astride the balusters.

“How many swains have you got, Miss Alliston, dying for love of you?”

“Will you head the list, Bubbles?”

“I think I will. I’ll tell you to-morrow.”

He waited for her at the foot of the balusters. She came down the stairs and into the light shed by the lamp in the hall.

“I’ll head it now!” he exclaimed earnestly. “I’ll be your swain forever and ever.”

She bowed. “Then you must do my bidding. Go to bed, O Bubbles!”

He slid to the ground. “I go!” he exclaimed dramatically, and skipped off upstairs.

She found the drawing-room occupied by her host. He was a big, loosely-built, fair man with kind, tired blue eyes. His face in repose was care-worn; but when he smiled it had a peculiarly young, innocent sort of expression that made him absurdly like Bubbles, and attracted her at once.

“Mrs. Derrington is late,” he said; “we must do our introducing ourselves. Perhaps you can guess who I am?” smiling.

“Bubbles’ father!”

He laughed out.

“Well, I’m the father of some few others as well, but that will do.”

He pulled a chair towards the fire for her. “It *has* its proper amount of castors, I think,” — he bent down and examined its legs; “that’s all right, Miss Alliston, and it’s a comfortable chair. Mrs. Derrington sees to that.

## IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

"There is n't an uncomfortable chair in this house, unless," his eyes twinkled, "you call odd castors and general dilapidation uncomfortable?"

She smiled. "The general dilapidation does away with stiffness, and the odd castors insure a rocking-chair."

"Oh, well, if that's how you look at it, it's all right. I hope you're not very hungry; dinner is late."

"Mrs. Derrington gave me such a good tea, I don't deserve any dinner at all. Anyway, I'm not ravenous yet."

"We're bad time-keepers here. If it were n't for Bunny I don't know how I should ever get out of the house in proper time in the mornings."

"Bunny? — that chubby mite?"

"Oh, yes; he's a business-like little chap; he has inherited his grandfather's practical disposition. At twenty-eight minutes past eight every morning he trots up to me, and demands, 'Yumbrella or walkin'-stick?' He learnt to tell the time on purpose, I fancy. He's never half a minute late."

"He is the youngest but one? How do they —"

"You're not going to ask me their ages, Miss Alliston? There's a fond young father at my place who has three children, and he knows their ages, their birthdays, at what age each walked, and talked, and cut its teeth. He says I have n't the paternal instinct. I believe Mrs. Derrington thinks I ought to give him the sack for saying that."

"I was only going to ask the order in which they come," she said meekly.

"I can manage that much, I think. Let me see — Pip comes first, then Bubbles, Dulcie, Peggy, Bunny, and the Cherub — that is all, I think — yes, that's right."

At that moment — twenty minutes past eight — Pauline came hurrying in.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! Jem, do do up that hook for me — there, on the shoulder. Dinner is ready. It was n't my fault —"

As they sat down to the table she went on, "I should have been ready *hours* ago, but just as I was changing, Bubbles and Bunny chose to have a theological dispute, and they *yelled* to me to come and settle it. I don't know what on earth it was all about — seraphim and cherubim and

the church service—it took me ages to settle it for them.”

“But—if you did n’t know what it was all about?” Helen suggested, with quizzical eyebrows.

Pauline smiled airily. “Oh, you soon get an adept at that sort of thing when you have a lot of Derrys.”

“She’s shocking, is n’t she, Miss Alliston?” Jem put in. “I’m afraid you won’t have a very high opinion of us as parents.” He lowered his voice mysteriously, “And there’s Hesky,” he said. “Pauline, we’d better tell her the family scandal—it’s bound to leak out, if we don’t.”

“Please do. My boxes are hardly unpacked yet.”

“You’ve seen Hesky, have n’t you?” Jem asked.

“Yes.”

“What do you think of her? Tell us how she appears to you.”

“Oh, a buxom, cosy sort of person, with a temper, and ruled by your Derrys, though she does n’t know it.”

“Hesky is a new woman, Miss Alliston!”

She laughed.

“She has a husband,” Pauline said. “You know, she used to be my nurse ages ago—”

“Oh, centuries, of course. Is she not the mother of six stalwart Derrys?” put in Jem *sotto voce*.

“And then she married Mr. William Angel, and left me, till I was married myself. She came to see me one day when Pip was a week old, and—”

“She stayed,” finished Jem.

Helen looked at Pauline.

“Do you mean she has stayed ever since, Mrs. Der-  
rington?”

Pauline nodded.

“Is n’t it a scandal, Miss Alliston? To keep a respectable woman from her lawful husband!” said Jem.

“What has become of him?”

“Oh, he lives with his sister. He always did live with his sister, only his wife lived with her too. Hush! here she comes.”

Hesky came in with a dish. She held her head high, and her lips were compressed. When she had to leave the room again Jem laughed.

## IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

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"She does n't always look so severe, Miss Alliston."

"William Angel is a meek little man, with a long nose, and a shuffle," Pauline said. "It is n't my fault that she stays here. I can't turn her out by force. It's the babies. 'Ugh!' she says, 'William's such an old Molly he'd never complain. The babies are a deal more interesting than that Angel.'"

"Moreover," pursued Jem, "she has a ridiculous notion that Mrs. Derrington is n't very old, and staid, and sort of managing, you know —"

"It's nothing whatever to do with me," Pauline interrupted in a dignified tone.

"Why is she called 'Hesky'?" Helen asked.

"Oh, in my youth she was Rebecca, Louisa, Mary Ann Heskith. I always called her Hesky."

When they had reached the nuts and bananas and apples, the door-handle was gently turned, and a beautiful, dejected Bubbles came in.

"That young scamp again!" Jem ejaculated. "What is it this time, Bubbles?"

Bubbles climbed on to a chair, and sat in limp dejection.

"Oh, Bubbles, you *are* tiresome!" Pauline exclaimed; "on Miss Alliston's first night, too!"

"George — Washington," Bubbles murmured, his blue eyes fixed sadly on the lamp, his flaxen hair forming an aureole to his pensive little face.

He went straight to Helen's heart.

"Poor little fellow," she murmured.

"Out with it, Bubbles!" Jem commanded in an unsympathetic voice.

"It was that old Molly, — he's got such a long nose — it's like Higgoty's nose, that 'reached from his face right down to his toes,' — and he came this morning to ask Hesky if she was comin' home just now, because his sister's goin' to have a lady to stay, and so she's turned him on to the dinin'-room table, and he thought Hesky might n't like sleepin' on a table, you see —" he sighed. "And he brought seven bunnyanas, and the squire was hungry — he had n't had any breakfast —" he paused.

Pauline was peeling a banana with undisturbed serenity. Helen, looking from her to the thin little figure in

blue pyjamas, seated dejectedly on the chair, with limp, hanging legs, decided that she was disgracefully hard-hearted.

"It was hours and hours after his breakfast time, and the Arab in the desert died on an empty stomach, you know." A twinkle crept for a moment into the sad blue eyes. "Must n't all the sand-ants have got up his nose-trills, Dad?"

"Hurry up, old man!" Jem cracked a nut, looked across at Pauline, and laughed. "Hope he does n't get his verbosity from his father!"

"Not he. You cut out much too much."

"But it's there to be cut out. Bubbles is the natural man."

"We had forgotten to buy some more oats, you see, and that old Angel-man had put the bunnynas on a plate in the cupboard —" he broke off — "George Washington could not tell a lie," he added in a dismal little voice, "and I — I — can!"

"How did you come to tell it?" Helen asked gently.

"I did n't tell one out-and-out-down-bang —"

Pauline suddenly arose, ran round the table, caught the slim figure up into her arms, and hugged it. "Oh, Bubbles, I looked at you! — I looked at you!"

Jem smiled at the apple on his plate.

"I was an idiot ever to get blue pyjamas for him," Pauline observed, sitting down, with Bubbles on her lap; "it's not my fault."

"Was it bananas, and you took one for your rabbit, and Mr. Angel found out?" Jem asked judicially.

Bubbles nodded sadly.

"Did he ask if you had taken one, and did you say 'No'?"

"I said, 'Dear me, you thought there were seven, Mr. Angel? It's very sad; could you be seeing *double*?' And he looked awful scared, the old jumbo, so I had to go on, and I said, 'People see double when they're *drunk*, Mr. Angel,' and then I laughed so, I ran away. And I do want to be like George Washington —"

Helen ventured consolingly, made brilliant by his terrible sadness, "He was older than you, Bubbles, when he

## IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

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said he could not tell a lie. He," boldly, "was eleven years old. If you don't tell any more, you can be like him after all."

Bubbles turned earnest eyes to her face.

"I daresay," she went on, "he told a story, too, once upon a time, when he was quite a small boy."

Bubbles pondered it; his face cleared.

"Silly old Angela!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "Mums, may I have that bunnyana now?"

"Well — I don't know —" Pauline hesitated; "stories are very bad, you know, Bubbles."

"Not when you're a small boy, Mums. George Washington told heaps," with a joyous smile.

Helen flushed with horror, her stricken eyes met her host's; she bit her lip as she saw his mirth.

Pauline laughed. "Oh, Bubbles, you've got it all wrong."

"If he ever told *one*, he was very, very sorry," Helen moralised severely, "and he never told another."

"How do you know? It does n't say so in the book," Bubbles observed with his head on one side.

Now Helen had no liking for George Washington; as a small child she had considered him overrated: Miss Flickers had admired him intensely, and he had tiresomely confronted her at every turn. The fact that his school exercise books were models of neatness and accuracy had been the culminating point. Helen's books were always filled with wild, eager scrawls, blots, smudges, drawings. Now that she was grown up she recognised him as a person deserving of admiration, but she had no affection for him. It struck her as funny that she should be taking up cudgels on his behalf to another child.

"Bubbles, how *can* you think that a — a person," she felt this was lame, "a *personage*," she corrected, "like George Washington would tell stories?"

All the sadness had fled from his face. "Oh," he observed airily, "we're all wicked old sinners. I 'spect he did tell a lot, anyway, if he told one." He eyed her mischievously; "don't you wish you had n't said that?" he asked.

Helen was at a loss.



## HELEN ALLISTON

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"There was an old man of Yoko,  
Wherever he went, don't you know,  
He got in such muddles  
And even in puddles,  
This funny old man of Yoko."

chanted Bubbles. "*You're* in a muddle now, are n't you?"

"She ought to be in a puddle—of your tears," remarked Pauline.

"Are n't you sorry now?" Helen asked, interested in his metamorphosis from a miserable little culprit to an impudent elf.

"I did n't really *tell* a story, did I?" he asked, reverting to earnestness.

"Look here," interposed his father, "you're to go up to bed, young man. And George Washington or no George Washington, you've got to be a man and tell the truth. See?"

"And if I do, ever-more-amen, can I be a George Washington?" He was deeply in earnest now.

"Oh, bless you, yes!" Jem swung him up on to his shoulder, and marched to the door. Bubbles looked back and airily waved his hand. "Good-night, O beauteous ladies of the Feast!"

"I don't believe other people have such queer children," Pauline observed when they had vanished; "and I never can be severe on them. I tried awfully hard to-night; and as long as I did n't look at him I was all right; but then I did look, and it was no good. I think it's the way his eyes match his pyjamas; anyway, Bubbles in his pyjamas is irresistible to me—and he looked so forlorn, poor mite. Miss Alliston, do have an apple; there is n't much choice in fruit at this time of year for scanty purses. You know, sometimes when things are very bad we live on bits. Will you mind? But I can always get you a chop."

"I shan't mind at all," Helen assured her. "I," rashly, "would rather live just as you do."

"How sweet of you!" Pauline's tone was full of admiration; "then I shall only give you bacon for breakfast to-morrow, instead of an egg as well, as I meant to. We hardly ever have both. There's something I've saved now! Mr. Derrington always says I'm such a terrible manager."

## IN THE LAND OF THE DERRYS

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"Tell me about Bubbles," Helen said, intensely amused.

"Well, you see, he has what his father calls a phosphorescent conscience — it shines only in the dark. All day long that Bubbles goes about as happy as a king, and as conscienceless; but directly he's in bed, with the light out, his conscience asserts itself, and there he lies, going over all the events of the day. And when he finds a sin he comes wandering down to be consoled. It's very tiresome, of course."

Helen smiled.

"He's always so airy and cheerful in the daytime. He's a queer little mortal. It was the effect of the lamp, mingled with your rash consolation just now, that began to cheer him up."

At half-past ten Helen went up to her room, smiling over the good-nights that had just been said to her.

She pushed open her door and went in. The room lay in a warm, ruddy glow of welcome; on the table the jonquils stood, a beautiful patch of colour. By the fireplace, drawn close, with a cosy suggestiveness, was the big old lounge chair. She looked round the room, at the glow on the white sheets, the pillow cases; at the fat yellow cushions shining in the firelight; at the bright rugs, and she smiled.

"I am lucky — lucky! Oh, what do the holes beneath the rugs matter?"

She went to the fire; she sat down in the big old chair.

"Of course it is comfortable."

She sat looking deep into the warm heart of the fire; round its red glow little yellow flames darted and flickered. She looked towards the bed. "That will be comfortable too — and the bedspread is charming, though it *has* been cleaned. The lot of a paying guest —"

Her thoughts stopped abruptly. She rose, and cautiously approached the bed. Yes, it was! In the flickering light from the fire, a large, fat-bodied spider lay on her pillow. She dared not move, lest she should frighten it away into her bed. She stood, wondering what she was to do. If it were only a mouse — but a spider! A great, horrid spider! She could not kill it, and equally certain was it that she could not get into bed with it there. Suddenly it struck her that it was very still. Hope rose within her. Perhaps it was not a spider after all. Cau-

tiously she approached a step towards the bed, another step, another — suddenly the little, low, soft laugh that was Helen's, and no one else's, broke from her. She picked the monster up airily, and examined it by the firelight. It was a tiny knot of pale blue, rather dirty baby-ribbon. She laid it on her table, wondering if Hesky wore knots of blue baby-ribbon in her hair, and had dropped it as she prepared her bed.

"I should n't be surprised — very; nothing would surprise me in this house, I think."

But before she rose next morning she knew her words had been rash.

She laid her head on her pillow with a sigh of content; the pillow smelt of lavender — and she liked these people — the children were charming —

Some sound woke her with a startled throbbing of heart. She lay and listened. She heard a stealthy movement beyond her door, then silence. She strained her eyes through the darkness; she tried to shake away the buzziness in her ears. Something moved down in the hall; it sounded as if a chisel were being laid down, or a bag filled with things stolen from the house. Her imagination rioted with her fear; indignation seized upon her. Did no one else hear those movements? Did they all sleep with their heads beneath the pillows? She longed to look at her watch, but she dared not light her candle, even if she could summon up courage to leave her bed, and grope for it.

Suddenly it struck her that it was horribly cowardly to lie there and let the house be rifled. She knew her hosts were not well-off. She sat up in bed and listened a little longer; she could hear nothing. She rose and slipped on her dressing-gown and slippers. Then she crept to the door; she put her ear against the panel, and listened again. All was still. She drew a long breath, then slowly turned the handle, and crept out on to the landing. Her eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness now, and though she did not realise it, the faint grey of dawn lent a little unreal light to the passage and staircase. And as she stood there, listening, a ghostly figure, indistinct, weird, floated slowly through the air away from her.

She stood petrified, staring before her. She could not have told what shape the ghostly figure had taken; in the

darkness she could not see its form; but there was the fact — the uncanny fact — that it had been in the air. As she stood listening she heard a steady, soft, thud-thud, coming up the stairs; then a form began to appear; straining her eyes, she distinguished gradually, in the growing light, a head and body; then as it grew nearer, a chubby body — and suddenly she laughed.

"Oh, Bunny, I believe it's you!"

"Oom," a voice responded, and the small figure came to a stand-still before her. She bent and picked it up, and hugged it. It struggled sturdily.

"Boy—not girl," it explained in deep-toned indignation.

"What are you doing here, Bunny?" She carried him into her room, and sat him on her bed, while she lit the candle.

"Bunny, how did you manage to fly?"

The immovable figure on the bed quivered into life. Bunny's face broke into a wide smile. "Ooo—oooh!" he chuckled gleefully.

Helen, seeing it was past seven in the morning, grew ashamed of herself. But she liked having that fat Bunny there, all the same.

She picked him up, and sat him in her lap. "You ought n't to be roaming the house at this time of—at this time," she admonished him severely.

"Rome—Nero," Bunny said. "Thumb-up—thumb-down." He stuck up a tiny brown thumb, then pointed it to the floor, after which he relapsed into solemn, brown-eyed silence once more.

Helen discovered undreamed-of depths of foolishness within her; she felt she could have kissed him and kissed him — his brown cropped head, his brown face, his neck.

"Bunny, would you like a biscuit?"

"Oom."

She went to a drawer, and took out the box of chocolate biscuits Lilian had insisted on her having.

"Who knows *how* they will feed you?" she had demanded; "and milk chocolate is *so* sustaining."

"They shall sustain Bunny at any rate," she thought, giving him one.

He took it with a wide smile and an "Ank"; he was chary even of letters, she discovered.

## HELEN ALLISTON

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Sitting on her lap, munching his biscuit, he grew friendly; he flourished the biscuit, from which he had licked most of the chocolate, towards her mouth for her to partake. When he had done, evidently thinking this paying guest was not as other young women, since she, too, roamed the house in the dark, he suggested beamingly, "Banners?"

Helen said, "What, dear?"

"Banners?" he said, with his head on one side, and his smile denting his cheeks.

She felt that she was lamentably ignorant.

"Bananas?" she ventured.

He looked at her and considered.

"In drawjer?" he asked, looking towards the chocolate biscuit drawer.

"Oh, no. Tell me what you mean about 'banners,' Bunny."

"Fly," he elucidated; "come fly?"

Sudden comprehension seized her.

"Slide down the balusters!" She laughed out. "Was that what you were doing, Bunny?"

He did not trouble to answer such a silly question; she had seen him doing it, and had told him so.

He wriggled towards the edge of her lap.

"Come fly?" he said insinuatingly.

But she carried him back to his bed instead, made him promise to stay there, gave him another biscuit, and left him, rolled up tight in the bedclothes, like a little fat chrysalis, in fear she was going to kiss him again.

## CHAPTER IV

### BUBBLES

HELEN decided that rashers of bacon, accompanied with Derry sauce, made a charming breakfast.

"You know," Pauline said with characteristic frankness, "we did mean to banish the Derrys to the kitchen for breakfast, but that was before we knew you."

## BUBBLES

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"I hate injustice; they don't deserve banishment."

Peggy gurgled joyfully. "Don't you love us heaps?"

"Peggy can do with any amount of loving," Jem observed, "she's a perfect little love-absorber."

"May," Pip's dark little face gleamed above her porridge bowl,—"may we help you to unpack, Miss Alliston?"

"Oh, yes."

Jem laughed.

"I'm a firm believer in the truth that women have more courage than men."

"Perhaps it is only that they are better disciplinarians, Mr. Derrington."

He eyed her quizzically.

"You think you're going to discipline those Derrys, Miss Alliston?"

"If they need it."

"Oh, they'll need it."

A cold nose was pushed suggestively into Helen's hand as it lay on her knee, and Stentor looked up sadly into her face.

"He's loving you," Dulcie said.

"He wants a piece of bread and butter." Pip was more practical.

"Poon-podge," the Cherub suddenly shrilled.

"Spoon-porridge," translated Pip proudly.

"Poon-podge! Poon-podge!"

Peggy went off into peals of irresistible, fat, baby laughter. "Oooh! Poon-podge! Oh—ooh," she chuckled.

"Oh, is n't he a flunny Cherub, Miss Alliston?"

"Brava, Pleggy!" Jem exclaimed; "that 'Miss Alliston' was perfect! My sweet Pleggy Dellington," he added to Helen, "has a weakness for 'I's.'"

"I slay words kerlite right now, Dad!"

"You do, Pleggy! You slay them most surely."

After breakfast Pauline came up to Helen.

"Let's sit by the fire a few minutes."

"But some one is calling you—"

"Oh, they always are. Cherub, come here."

The Cherub crawled across the floor to her, and rolled at her feet, chuckling.

"Lazy Cherub not to walk."

From the hall came Hesky's voice:

"Out of my kitchen you go! Raisins, is it? Not you! Oh, you can't wheedle me, my dears! You want to make puddings for your poor soldiers? Not me! Out you go!"

A pause; then a Derry chorus —

"Oh, Hesky, may your shadow never grow less, or your temper more!"

Helen looked at Pauline. "Do you mean to say they've got the raisins?"

"Yes. Oh, Hesky's a stern disciplinarian, you know."

"What would you have done, Mrs. Derrington, if it had turned out that I disliked children?"

"Oh, I don't know. Would," ingenuously, "you have disliked the Derrys, do you think?"

"I defy any one to do it."

The door was pushed open. Pip's dark little face came round it.

"Mother, cooking apples are sixpence a pound. Hesky says you'd better have jam tart"

"Very well."

Pip vanished.

"Do you like this house?" Pauline asked. "You know we could get a heap for it now — they want to build — but we won't turn out."

"Musher," Peggy trotted in, beaming, "there's a man in the orshard, and he wants to get out."

"A man in the orchard? What is he doing there?"

"Slaying 'damn,'" Peggy responded, gurgling with joy.

"But — how did he get in?"

"Bubbles said, 'Oh, come and look at fairy fruit in globbles of pink and gold,' and he came in."

"The orchard runs down to the road at the back of the house," Pauline explained to Helen. "Why does n't he get out, Peggy?"

"Door shtuck. We shut him in, and now the door won't open. Oh, he says he'll put us all in plison;" her blue eyes danced.

Pauline rose, and, with the Cherub in her arms, departed.

Helen sat on alone. Presently the door was pushed wider, and Dulcie slipped in. She stopped a few paces from the door, and stood shyly looking down at the carpet.

"Come and sit with me," Helen said.

She came slowly over to the fireplace, and, leaning against Helen's knee, looked up earnestly into her face.

"Did you — did you —" she said, and stopped.

"Did I what, dear?"

The pale little face was growing slowly pink.

"Did you find it?" she whispered anxiously.

"Find what, sweetheart?"

She saw with horror the acute disappointment that gathered in the child's face. What was it? What should she have found?

Over the grey eyes still raised to hers a mist crept; Dulcie's lip quivered; the pink in her face deepened to a sudden shamed red.

"I — I 'spect it *was* silly —" she murmured; "Pip would *laugh*! But I — I thought — it was so pretty — on your pillow — I *are* silly —"

Helen suddenly understood.

"Last night," she said, "I went to bed in a strange room. The table was strange, the chairs were strange, the wash-hand stand was strange, the bed was strange. And suddenly I saw on my pillow —" she hid a smile at the remembrance of the manner of that sudden seeing — "a friendly little bow of pale blue ribbon, — such a pretty little smiling knot of ribbon, Dulcie —"

"Oh! Oh, how *tumultuous* you are!"

"Did you put it there?"

She nodded.

"Go on, dear-love-sweet —"

Helen was very unhappy. She wondered if that knot of blue ribbon had been captured yet by Hesky. If it were in the dust-bin — down the sink. She realised that the intricate ways of imagination swiftly brought punishment in their train.

"What a kind little welcomer you were to put it there."

"I was n't going to be kind-welcomer. I thought I should hate you. I did n't think paying guests were beautiful and good and —"



"Dulcie! Dulcie, you're to come and make Miss Alliston's bed. Hesky's busy, and mother's lost."

It was Pip's shrill voice. Helen rose hastily, and she and Dulcie went upstairs together. Helen stealthily rescued the knot of ribbon from the toilet table, and slipped it into the front of her blouse. Then she turned and eyed the two small Derrys pounding away at her pillows.

"Pip and I will make the bed," she said.

Dulcie flushed scarlet. "Was n't I doing it right? Please let me —"

"My dear, you were doing it far better than I should, only you're such a little bit of a thing —"

"I love doing it."

So she said no more; she stood a little while and watched. Philippa was the quicker of the two. "Hurry up, Dulcie! Here's the top sheet —"

Dulcie, patting the pillow with gentle little fingers, — "Wait a minute, Pip. This is where her head will come. I'm making it comfortable."

"Hurry up, Dulcie! It's the blankets now."

Dulcie, carefully untucking a tiny piece of sheet towards the head of the bed, — "I'm just making a little hole for her to get in by, so she won't have to untuck all the covers."

Helen went downstairs, and waited for her hostess's reappearance.

But Pauline did not come. She sat on, thinking out a story. She wondered, whimsically, how she would manage to write in this house. She had left the door ajar, and in a few minutes the Cherub crawled in, followed by a perky little rabbit. A hunt followed, watched with interest by Helen. Of course the rabbit won; but the way he entered into the game showed it was no new one to him.

Then the rabbit ran out of the room, and Helen, in consternation lest Stentor should get him, chased him across the hall, and into the front garden. There she stopped, terrified that if she pursued him he would go out into the road. "Bubbles! Pip! Any one!" she called.

Bunny appeared, sliding down the balusters.

"Oh, Bunny, your namesake — the rabbit — has gone into the front garden!"

"Come fly?" Bunny said beamingly.

## BUBBLES

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"But, Bunny, he will get away — he'll run out into the road. Go after him — he knows you —"

"*I know you — you know me —*  
Which little boy in blue kno—ows *he*?"

Bunny said earnestly.

She refused to smile.

"You're a cruel little boy," she said sternly.

"Bun am?" Bunny's brown face crinkled up in appreciation of her wit; he doubled his fists, — "Fight! Kill! Bang!"

Pip came running down the stairs. Helen eagerly appealed to her.

"Oh, he's all right," Pip assured her. "How funny you are! *All* the rabbits run about anywhere."

"Why didn't you tell me, Bunny?"

Helen felt indignant.

Bunny sat on the lowest stair and tried to find out why he had n't. He gave it up at last. He pointed a brown finger upwards — "Chockler biskits up there?" he insinuated with an adorable smile.

"Not for you just now, my Bunny."

"No?" He put his head on one side, and considered the matter. "To-mollerow?" he said.

"Perhaps. If you look at me like that, you round, brown fascination, I shall kiss you."

"No!" He frowned, and, rising, trotted off towards the kitchen.

Helen went back to the morning-room, and found a black Cherub eating coal from the coal-box.

"Oh, Cherub!" She stood and eyed him in consternation.

"Want?" The Cherub took a piece from his mouth, and held it out to her.

Her eyes widened in horror.

"You — have you *eaten* any?" she gasped.

He smiled and nodded his golden head. "Eat," he gurgled; "eat — eat."

She caught him up and carried him off to the back regions, where she could hear voices.

"Mrs. Derrington," she called.

Pauline appeared, enveloped in a big apron, and with her sleeves rolled back.

"I'm so sorry. I left him alone, and he has been eating the coal."

"Oh, dirty Cherub! Make all black and nasty. Mother is cross —"

"He *ate* it," Helen repeated.

"I daresay; babies eat everything. Hesky, take him and wash him, and put on a clean pinny—"

"But won't it hurt him?"

"Oh, no! Nothing ever hurts him."

Helen went up to her room with a thoughtful brow. Pip, Dulcie, and Peggy joined her to help her unpack.

"I do like you," Pip observed; "Hesky does n't. She's so cross because we've got to have a fire in the drawing-room *always* now, and so dad can't have one in the den — dad's an author when he's at home, you know."

Helen turned to her eagerly.

"What does he write?"

"Oh, Shakespeare and Browning, and all sorts."

Helen smiled. "Poetry?"

"Not mostly — What a beautiful hat —"

"Does your father write essays, do you mean?"

Pip nodded.

"Oh!" Peggy squealed; "oh, *ink!*"

Helen looked round in time to see a black stream running down Peggy's pinafore. Above the traveller's ink-pot Peggy's face looked, red and abashed. "I — I only plessed a little knobby —"

Helen whipped off her pinafore, and with blotting-paper stayed further mischief.

"Now you'll be turned out," Pip said.

Peggy walked meekly towards the door. Helen, looking after the fat little back and dejected legs, forgave their owner all, even though her own fingers were stained with ink.

"Never mind, Peggy — you need n't go."

Peggy stood still, but did not turn round.

"It's all right, dear."

"Thank you."

She stood in the middle of the room, with her back

## BUBBLES

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turned to the others. Helen guessed what was the matter, and left her alone.

"Dulcie, what are you looking at so lovingly?"

"Oh — is n't it *desecrations?*" She held up a piece of pale blue panne velvet. "It's all soft and soft — and pretty —"

"What a queer little soul you are."

"She used to have headaches — that's why her hair was all cut off," Pip volunteered.

"Do you have them now, Dulcie?"

"Not much. When I grow up I will wear pale blue velvet dresses with a silver sash —"

"I," came from Peggy of the Roly-polies, still back-wise to her audience, "will have *gold* dresses."

After which, finding her voice firm, she turned herself about, and trotted back beaming to the others.

Suddenly, through the open window, a voice floated. "Listen," Helen whispered.

"'Come away,' sighs the Fairy Voice,  
'Come, follow me to Carrig-Cleena!  
For there I make all aching hearts rejoice —  
Come, come away!'"

The voice, inimitably sad, inimitably beautiful, died away for a moment. She waited, scarcely breathing. It rose again —

"'Yes! It is I!  
For my voice will lie  
In the west wind's sigh  
Like the wailing note of a Banshee's cry,  
Saying, 'Come, come, come away,  
To the caves of Carrig-Cleena!'"

The breeze whispered in the silence that followed. She drew a deep breath. She looked round at the Derrys: Pip was trying on a pair of her gloves; Peggy was tying a ribbon round her doll. Only Dulcie had been listening; her eyes, wide and full of dreams, met Helen's.

"It was Bubbles," she said.

"Bubbles! *What* a voice! What was it he was singing? It was beautiful —"

"Don't you *know*?" Pip's tone could not have been more horrified if she had said she did not know her alphabet. "Why, Molly sings it in 'The Emerald Isle.'"

"Ah, Sullivan. Where is Bubbles? Would he sing it again?" She threw the window wider, and leant out. "His voice seemed to come from heaven!" She smiled at herself, but involuntarily she looked upwards, and there, to the left, throned above, on a prosaic window-ledge, sat Bubbles. He did not see her; he sat with his legs crossed; an old cloth cap adorned with ivy-leaves was stuck at the back of his head; in his hand he held a dilapidated tennis-racket, — a lute, on which his fingers played softly, as his voice rose again in the song "Take a Pair of Lovely Eyes."

Helen drew in her head sharply.

"He is on a window-ledge above —"

She was moving swiftly towards the door. "I don't know how to get him in — if I startle him he will fall —"

"Oh!" Pip burst out laughing. "I'll do it!"

Before Helen could stop her, her head was out of the window, and her voice broke ruthlessly in on Bubbles' liquid notes.

"Bubs, you're to go in! Miss Alliston says so!"

"Sha'n't! 'Take a pair of rosy lips' —"

"She's frightened, Bubbles!" There was mirth in Pip's voice.

The song stopped abruptly.

"Really? Wait a bit. Tell her to look *now*!"

Pip drew in her head.

"Miss Alliston, he wants you."

Helen leant from the window. Above, on the window-ledge, Bubbles stood in an airy pose, one leg extended into vacancy, the toe delicately pointed.

"Ladies *and* gentlemen, behold the cerebated acrobat —"

"Bubbles!" her voice, poignant in its distress, seemed to afford him huge delight.

"Ladies *and* gentlemen, in another moment —"

She turned and fled downstairs to the kitchen. She broke in on Pauline rolling pastry, assisted by the Cherub.

"Bubbles is on a window-ledge!"

## BUBBLES

"Oh, he is tiresome!" Pauline ejaculated. "Hesky, go and haul him in. I'm too floury."

"I'd go anyways." She picked up the rolling-pin. "You would n't be stern enough, ma'am."

"Oh, be careful," Helen called after her; "if he is startled — it is a narrow ledge —"

"It's the landing window," Pauline observed. "Would you mind just seeing that that milk does n't burn?"

"I — don't think you understand — if he were to fall —"

"But he won't fall. He never does. He's as sure-footed as a mountain goat. He climbs up the ivy to that ledge, you know. We always haul him in."

Floating down to the kitchen came Hesky's indignant voice. "Of all the naughty imps! Well, you'll be put to bed for this, Master Bubbles!"

Every syllable was as sweetest music to Helen. Then, since her anxiety was allayed, misgivings assailed her.

"A rolling-pin is horribly hard," she suggested tentatively.

Pauline laughed. "You don't imagine Hesky ever uses it? She always picks up something ferocious — the poker, or the rolling-pin, or her slipper, which is perhaps the most ferocious of all — but she has never touched one of those Derrys yet! Oh, she means to — firmly — each time; just as each time she gets into a bad grump she means to return to her husband — but she never does either."

Hesky's voice broke in again.

"It's no good you trying to slip out of my hand; you're like an eel, but I've got you, Master Bubbles! You're a bad boy, that's what you are, and off you go to bed, and you don't get up till you say you're sorry!"

Bubbles' voice responded in an airy chant:

"Off with his head!

And put him to bed.

Which way up — oh, which way down?"

This is what King Richard said

When he had shaved off Buckingham's crown."

Helen laughed. "Oh, what awful children!" she groaned.

Pauline pensively spread raspberry jam on the pastry.

"Do you think so? Anyway," cheerfully, "we sha'n't be bothered with Bubbles all day, because he's never sorry till it gets dark, so he'll be shut away."

"Poor little soul —"

"Oh, no; he's been told and punished about that ledge heaps of times, and," consolingly, "he always manages to enjoy himself somehow, even when he's shut into his room."

Helen went back to her room, feeling a traitress; still, indignation was mixed with her pity; she was indignant with Bubbles for giving her such a horrible fright.

She found her room a turmoil, — hats, frocks, boots, shoes strewn anywhere and everywhere, including Pip's and Dulcie's and Peggy's bodies.

She turned them out of the room, and set about to clear up the débris.

At luncheon, when she saw the plate of bread and butter and glass of milk that was being prepared for Bubbles, she asked impulsively if she might take his dinner up to him.

"Oh, yes, if you like," Pauline said; "only don't stay, or everything will be cold."

She made her way upstairs, full of pity and a longing to make the prisoner say he was sorry.

She unlocked the door and went in.

The room was in a chaotic condition; she looked with a little involuntary shiver towards the bed, where, stretched out, hands folded on his breast, lay a white, apparently headless figure. Moreover, the top of the white nightgown was adorned with patches of gruesome red.

"Bubbles!" she said.

"My head is off — I am dead — my head has been given to the carrion crows —"

"Don't, Bubbles! Here's your dinner."

The white figure erected itself; from the opening down the front of the nightgown Bubbles' head appeared. He pointed an accusing finger at her:

"Ding dong  
Tongue too long!  
Tell-tale  
Go to jail!"

## BUBBLES

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Helen felt herself growing hot. She began to wish she had let Hesky bring up his dinner.

"Don't be rude, Bubbles," she said in a dignified voice. "Where did you get that nightgown?"

"It's Pip's; she left it here some time I s'pose. Miss Alliston, can you say:

"Captain Crackskull cracked a catchpole's cockscomb!  
Did Captain Crackskull crack a catchpole's cockscomb?  
If Captain Crackskull cracked a catchpole's cockscomb,  
Where's the catchpole's cockscomb Captain Crackskull cracked?"

She eyed him gravely.

"I believe you're rather mad, Bubbles, and I don't believe you're a bit sorry."

"No, I'm not. Is that my prison fare, O cruel lady?"

"It's all you deserve."

"Miss Alliston," he wheedled, kneeling upon the bed, "there's jam in the cupboard in the kitchen, and Hesky's in the dining-room —"

"I should not think of such a thing, Bubbles! I'm ashamed of you."

He sighed. "Oh, well," philosophically, "never mind. You'd better go down again, your dinner'll be getting cold."

He made her feel that she was distinctly greedy.

"I did think p'raps Hesky would let me off, because you told her, you see. She does n't like you. She does n't want a payin' guest. When mums told her you were comin' for certain sure, she went further home than she ever has before. She went right to the corner of Wheat Street — we followed her and saw her. Had n't you better go and eat your dinner, Miss Alliston?" he broke off.

"Bubbles dear," she came closer, "are n't you sorry you frightened us so?"

He laughed out. "Why, that's the bestest part!"

She put down the plate and glass, and went down to her luncheon. It was tepid, and she felt cross with Bubbles. She became aware gradually that Bunny had altered somehow. She caught him frowning at her; he did not answer once when she addressed him. His attitude hurt her ridiculously; there was something in Bunny's brown roundness,



in his serious dark eyes, that appealed to her strongly. After luncheon she went up to him with wicked carneying — “Bunny, come and have a chocolate biscuit?”

He stood very still; she saw a struggle take place in his face, then he raised his shoulder at her. “Go to jail,” he grunted, and trotted away.

“I call that as bad as swearing.”

Left standing in the hall, she looked round whimsically. “So I’m a sneak, it appears.”

Dulcie rushed screaming across the hall; behind her came Pip, also screaming. They disappeared out into the garden at the back of the house.

“This,” Helen said firmly, “is a game.”

She met Pauline.

“How your children enter into their games!” she observed airily.

“Yes, they do.”

“Pip and Dulcie tore screaming out into the garden just now — they looked frightened —”

“Pursued by Red Indians. Are you fond of music, Miss Aliston?”

“Yes.”

“We’re all Gilbert and Sullivan mad here. Are you?”

She sighed. “They’re not much more than names to me.”

“Oh!” Pauline eyed her, with her neat little dark head on one side, “you’re not heavy-classical only, are you?”

“Not by choice. At Thorpe, my old home, we had no modern music — only old-fashioned — some funny and sentimental,” she smiled as she thought of Miss Flickers’ contributions, “others beautiful, but nothing at all light.”

“We’ll educate you up to Sullivan.”

“I sha’n’t need educating. The little scanty bits of him I’ve heard I love. Bubbles, this morning, was exquisite.”

“Is n’t his voice charming? All the Derrys have sweet little pipes, but his is the best. Do you sing? But I’m sure you do.”

Helen shook her head. “I don’t. I’d love to sing.”

“But you could! What a pity! Mr. Derrington said last night, ‘What a voice! We must get her to sing to us.’”

## BUBBLES

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She flushed. "I've never even been taught."

"You could begin now. We know a Madame Dupont — a splendid teacher."

"My will, but not my poverty, consents," she parodied.

Pauline's dark eyes opened wide.

"But you're not poor, surely!" she exclaimed ingeniously.

"I am, indeed," with a sigh.

"But you're not in the least like a poor person. The very blouse you have on!"

"Made by my own fingers," dramatically.

"I thought it was a French model!"

"I copied it from one."

Pauline was silent.

"But —" she began again presently, "you look so different. I fancied, directly I saw you, that you were used to having plenty of money."

"It's my bridesmaid trousseau."

Pauline laughed.

"Tell me about your sister's wedding, will you?"

Soon after, Helen went upstairs to fetch a photograph of Lilian. In a passage she caught sight of a glimmer of flaxen hair that belonged assuredly to Bubbles. Stentor bumped up affectionately against her, licked her hand, then went and slapped suggestively at the door of a cupboard on the landing. When this brought no result, he raised his head and howled.

Helen hurried away and shut herself into her own room.

"Tell-tale  
Go to jail,"

she murmured. "I," firmly, "will *not* tell-tale again."

A little later on she went out, and at the gate met a contingent of Derrys.

"Surely you ought to have hats and coats on?" she suggested.

They assured her they were not out "propelly"; begged to be allowed to accompany her, rushed back to dress, and came back reinforced by Bunny and — "May this little friend come too?" Pip asked demurely.

Helen declared she would be delighted; whereupon

Peggy burst out laughing, and received smacks from various energetic hands.

"She's Alicia de Vere," Pip volunteered.

Helen wondered if they thought they were imposing on her. She recognised Bubbles' thin little legs beneath Pip's skirt; Bubbles' hair tucked away inside Peggy's hood; Bubbles' eyes, nose, mouth. Were they "making pretend" that she was taken in? With a sudden whisk back to childhood she entered into their fun. She took Alicia's hand, she talked to her, she wondered if the dear old lady — Mrs. de Vere — she had met at D'Aubrey Castle were any relation to Alicia? She was assured eagerly that she was her grandmother.

"Oh, *such* a dear old lady!" Dulcie exclaimed, "with little bobbery white curls, and mauve ribbons in her cap, and she looks over the top of her specklytles—like this—"

Helen looked down at the little drooping head with the eyes gazing up over imaginary spectacles, and a sudden heart-felt pity for a lonely little Helen in a gloomy old house with no one to "pretend" swept over her. *How* that Helen would have revelled amongst these Derrys!

"But *did* you ever see my grandfather?" inquired Alicia. "He's as big—as big—oh, his ancestors came from Brobdingnag, and he has a beard two yards long, and hair stickin' up, and his voice rolls like thunder in a storm, and his nosetrills curl when he's angry, and he says, 'Bub—Alicia, thou must learn ten chappers of "The Boy who did his Duty"'; and I say, 'Alas, poor Yorick,' and I sit on a grey cloud, and float and float, and I fling 'The Boy who did his Duty' to the earth; and behold the people say, 'The stars are fallin'!' and then the *real* stars laugh; they twinkle and twinkle, and the man in the moon grins—"

"Oh, be quiet," Pip interposed; "once you start you'd go on and on—"

"My dear, are you not rather rude to your guest?" said Helen.

This convulsed Peggy so that she could not get along for laughing. Bunny chuckled, and Dulcie's face glowed with joy.

Pip informed her that her mother wanted some sweet biscuits dreadfully badly, so Helen volunteered to get them.

## BUBBLES

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She wanted some ribbon herself, and was accompanied into each shop by the whole Derry contingent. They knew every one, and she found their remarks, albeit amusing, rather embarrassing at times.

"Oh, Mr. Thwaite, *are* your corns better to-day?"

So Pip to a dignified old portly gentleman patrolling his draper shop, and keeping a cold eye on his assistants.

"Miss Alliston, this is Mr. Thwaite, and he *does* suffer so with corns!"

Mr. Thwaite's purple confusion was alarming. Helen remembered reading somewhere that stout people were more liable to apoplexy than their thinner brethren. She hurried through into the next department, where she did not want anything, and an obliging young man fetched ribbons through to her.

Dulcie inquired tenderly of the sleek-headed young man in the grocer's if his "young lady" were quite well.

"It's a pity you can't afford to get married yet, because then we could come and see you," Pip said; "and the furniture shop in the next street has got a washstand — it's green — for five shillings and sixpence. I think you ought to buy it now, else it may be sold, you see, and you could keep it, could n't you?"

The young man's blushes were pitiful; he bent so low over the bill he was making out, that he showed only two scarlet ears and a shiny top of head.

"And if ever Stentor has any pluppies, you shall have one to guard your house," Peggy assured him.

Helen had carefully hidden away her Cambridge paper, her MSS., even her nibs, in fear that she should be found out. The knowledge that her host wrote filled her with terror. How would she ever dare send off stories now? He would scent a publisher in the returned envelope; would, perhaps, offer to read her stories! She grew hot at the idea. Yet write she must, and at once. She knew that, as matters stood now, she could not stay at the "Red Cottage" for long. Her idea had been to come for a while, to write hard, and see if she could obtain any footing in the literary world. If she still failed, she had decided she would have to try for some place as companion.

She lay awake that night thinking and puzzling. She fell asleep at last with the determination to lock her door the next day and write — write — write. The cold she would defy — “the literary fever will keep me warm.”

The next morning she was awaked by a scraping on her door. The thought of rats darted gruesomely through her mind. She reminded herself firmly that she was in the land of the Derrys, and sitting up in bed, asked clearly who was there. An alluring whisper came through the keyhole. “Come fly, de-ah?”

“No! Go back to bed, Bunny!”

She lay down again; but the thought of brown Bunny sliding the balusters in the dark appalled her. She doubted strongly whether he would obey her and go back to his bed. Sadly she slipped from between the bedclothes, lit her candle, and putting on her dressing-gown and slippers, unlocked the door, and went out on to the landing. She bent over the balusters, and by the candle’s flickering light beheld a pink-pyjamaed figure astride the column that finished them at the foot. Bunny was galloping on horse-back for his life; he bent to his saddle; he glanced back over his shoulder at his pursuers.

“Bunny!”

He took no notice.

“*Bunny!*”

He looked up; a smile irradiated his face; he bundled himself off his steed and came plodding up the stairs. He slipped a warm little hand into hers. “You come fly,” he said, in a satisfied voice.

“No, Bunny, I have come to send you back to bed.”

He looked at her gravely.

“Come fly,” he wheedled; “Bun hold you, de-ah.”

“You are to go back to bed at once.”

He pointed to her door.

“Chockler biskits!” he said in a surprised voice.

She picked him up. “Oh, very well; but, sweet Bunny, there will be conditions attached to this biscuit to-day.”

She sat him on her bed and fetched a biscuit.

“Now,” she said, “will you promise not to — fly — in the dark any more?”

He considered.

"Night so long," he sighed.

She kissed him.

"Promise, Bunny."

"Allyright."

She gave him the biscuit.

"'Ank," he said.

She watched him as he ate it.

"Bunny, yesterday you would n't have a biscuit when I offered it you."

He knew that already; grown-ups were chatterboxes; what need to tell him a fact like that? Evidently it needed no answer. He gave it none.

"Bunny, why do you take a biscuit now?"

He licked the chocolate off while he considered the matter.

"Let Bubbles out — solly," he observed at last.

She stared at him aghast.

"I let Bubbles out? I?"

He crinkled up his face in appreciation of her dramatic "pretending."

"Bunny, I did n't."

He looked grave.

"Must n't tell 'tories," he reproved her.

Into her mind flashed her exit from the prisoner's room; *had* she left the key entrusted to her by Pauline in the lock?

"I left the key there!" she said in a stricken voice.

"Oom," Bunny said; he thrust the remnant of his biscuit at her for her to partake.

She was thinking of Pauline's words last night. "He never bears malice. He's as bright and cheerful now as if he had been free all day. And he is sorry now. He has come to the conclusion that it is wicked to frighten people."

"The conclusion will be inverted again by daylight," Jem had laughed. And the red ink stains on Pip's night-gown had been forgiven, in consideration of the cheerfulness with which Bubbles had borne his imprisonment.

Helen had felt guilty then; *now* she felt that she was deserving of the last resource of the law.

"Bunny," she said, "go back to bed."

# HELEN ALLISTON

## CHAPTER V

### IN THE DERRY EDITORIAL ROOM

THE drawing-room fire difficulty was soon overcome. Helen, on being introduced to the den, was enthusiastic. It was a long, narrow room, with one large book-case, and roughly put-up shelves running all along the walls. The room overflowed with books, papers, magazines; and, here and there, Derry bits, — slates, crayons, paints, drawings, books. The table was littered with Jem's writing paraphernalia, but even the table was not sacred from evidences of the Derrys.

"They publish their magazine here," Pauline observed; "it's supposed to be a monthly publication, but it's rather erratic."

"Oh, I'd like to see it."

Pauline went to the table and rummaged amongst the papers.

"Won't you lose Mr. Derrington's landmarks?" Helen suggested in horror.

"Oh, he never has any; there are no sign posts in the 'Red Cottage'; and anyway he's used to the Derrys. Here's a bit of the last number of the mag." She handed her a sheet of paper torn from an exercise book. "It's advertisements, is n't it?"

Helen nodded and began to read:

"Try our new baby's food, justly called The Babys Sallvation. Read the following letter from a gratfull mother:—

"DEAR SIR, — Kindly forward one hundread & fifty tins of your unaprochable Babys Sallvation for my infant. My littel one lay dyeing inch by inch the doctors shook their heads. With tears floing as a last retort I wended my steps to the grocers. A tin of the Babys Salvation I said fantly. Its a splended thing Madam quoth the young man but sadly shook I my head. Too late I cried too late. Hast quoth he. Too late I moned too late & hyed me to my babe. Dead I cried dead as the door nail, & in a frensy poured I a spoonfull of the food down her waxen throat. Sir, I put no salt in it, it needed it not my tears floed upon it & salted it. My babe

## IN THE DERRY EDITORIAL ROOM

opened her eyes feebly she put out her white hand for more! Sir she lives fat & rosy. The mending of a Mothers broken hart is yours.

Yours truly

"MRS. ADELINA FITZ-HERBERT."

She looked up laughing.

"Do you help with this?"

"Good gracious, no! No one touches anything in their mag. unless it is properly signed. You see, contributions are invited." She handed her another sheet.

"TO CORRESPONDANTS,—The Editor of the Derry Magyzine will at all times be pleased to consider short storys artikels drawings, etc submitted. A stamped adressed envelop should be inclosed. He will indeavour to return them if unsuitable, but will not hold himself ressponsable for axidental loss."

On the same sheet was a poem signed James Lucien Graham Derrington (Bubbles).

"The horse he galoped with nostrils aflame!  
On! On! galant steed did his master exclaim!  
The enemys bulets behind them sung  
With a pish pash! pish pash! pish pash! pung!  
Over the bear felt  
Just you & me  
The dark can be felt  
But I have thee!

"A bullet it came with a pish & a boom!  
Alass galant steed that bulets thy doom!  
The enemys bulets around them sung  
The master by his horse himself down flung.  
Upon the bear felt  
Alass wo is me!  
The dark can be felt  
And I havent got thee!

"He sprang to his feet with an anger so wild!  
Thy death Ill invenge thou dearer than child!  
The enemys bulets around him sung  
But *his* brave bulet lodged in a Boers lung!  
Upon the bear felt  
I die, nor will I flee!  
The dark can be felt,  
But Ill join thee."

"I'm sorry it's lost," Pauline said; "it was a good number with a great many of Pip's illustrations. She is



very fond of drawing animals — she does most of the illustrations. And there was a story — I can't think where it can have vanished to. I know Dulcie had painted a full-page illustration, with a Princess and fairies in it, and there was a really good pencil drawing of Bubbles' — a rough sea and a ship, with a sea-horse somewhere — ”

“ Can they all draw ? ”

“ Oh, well, more or less. I used to scribble a lot when I was younger, and you know Mr. Derrington is an architect, and my father was an artist — it's in their blood — that love of daubing, I think. But Pip is the best. She's really clever at it. And always animals — ”

“ I've seen some of her work on the walls of the attic — ”

“ The 'Theatre of Varieties,' please! The Derrys will give you a blank gaze if you mention the attic to them. So you've been up there? ”

“ Oh, yes. I was escorted up by the whole contingent, and was informed proudly that it was n't an *ordinary* theatre — ‘ That's why dad christened it the 'Theatre of Varieties,' because we act tragedies, and comedies, and circuses, and conjurors, and concerts — and all sorts! ’ ”

Pauline smiled. “ It's true. Look, here's a sketch of Pip's. It made Dulcie so miserable that Pip had to do another. ”

Helen looked down admiringly at the clever sketch. It was entitled “ Out in the cold, ” and represented a yard of some sort, with a large flat basket filled with straw standing by the wall beneath a projecting roof. In the basket a terrier sat, and grouped about her, in various attitudes, were five fat puppies, all spotlessly clean and in good condition. To the left there was a gate, and looking through the bars, a dirty little skinny puppy stood forlornly in the pouring rain.

“ There's so much expression in it, ” Helen said; “ the poor wistful-eyed puppy, and the happy rollicking ones, and the complacent, sleek mother. It's splendid. I don't wonder Dulcie was overcome. ”

“ Pip had to draw another. She called it ‘ Safe in Port. ’ In it the dejected puppy had just been captured by a little girl, and was being fed and loved before a great fire. I

don't know what became of it. Perspective is n't her strong point, is it?"

"The yard is on a steep hill — that's all."

"The basket is killing, of course, and so is that tipsy gate; but she gets the idea of the thing well, does n't she?"

"Wonderfully. There's such a style about it — such a dash."

Pauline nodded.

Helen looked up from the picture with amused eyes.

"Was it Pip who stuck the stamp on your letter to me, do you remember?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Why?"

"The fingers that manipulated that stamp were pencilly. I think it was that that decided me to come here!"

"Oh, I expect it was Pip. You felt we must be artistic? I hope you're not horribly disappointed. Oh, that letter." She gave a little laugh. "I wrote it on a sudden wild impulse; times were *very* bad just then, and I was sitting trying to think where I could economise, and I caught sight of your advertisement in the paper, and — I wrote straight off! The paper was an old one. I consoled myself and the others with the assurance that it was too late to secure you — oh, I did repent directly that letter was posted! And Mr. Derrington was *so* cross about it — now there;" she broke off and pointed dramatically to a bulging portfolio, a pen, and some sheets of much-used blotting paper; "that is the 'Author's Own Special Corner'!"

Helen looked down with a glow in her deep eyes.

"May I read something of his?"

"Oh, yes, he has n't had very much published, you know. He has so little time to write. Even in the evening he has to do architectural work sometimes. He brings it home, when he can, instead of staying on at the office — he declares he can work better up here!" She laughed. "Well, here are some magazines with things of his in them, Miss Alliston. That," she pointed to an enormous drawing-board standing against the wall, "is some of his architectural work."

When Jem that evening asked Helen for her opinion of his writing, she said: "Oh, I think they are good — *good!* The style is so strong somehow —"

He flushed like a boy.

"You look as if you meant it, Miss Alliston."

"Do you think it impertinent of an outsider to offer an opinion?"

He looked at her keenly; the expressive voice had dropped a little at that "outsider."

"I think you are very kind," he said simply; "your opinion is worth having — I am glad you like my writing."

So the drawing-room fire remained unlit, and Helen sat contentedly in the den, while Jem wrote, and Pauline worked, or read, or idled and chattered.

It was when she had been a few days at the "Red Cottage," that one morning, coming down to breakfast, she noticed a subtle change in the atmosphere. Over the cheerful Derrys there hung a gloom: over Pauline an excitement. She looked round with interest. She noticed a sedateness in the way the porridge spoons were handled, a demureness in attitudes, unusual and edifying. Only the Cherub brandished his spoon as usual, helped himself to lumps of sugar unchidden, and gurgled and jumped half out of his high-chair, in the horrible way that always sent her arms out towards him in spite of stern resolve on her part to ignore his acrobatic feats, as his own belongings did.

Pauline hardly spoke; she was hurriedly eating her breakfast and reading a circular at one and the same time. Every now and then she glanced anxiously at the clock on the mantel-shelf. Helen noticed with surprise that it was going; the hands had pointed to twenty minutes past six on her arrival and had pointed to that ever since.

"Pip," she said in a cautious undertone, "has anything happened?"

Pip dipped her spoon into her porridge languidly. "It's the Sales," she said mournfully.

She confessed she did not quite understand.

"The *Winter Sales*," Pip further explained.

"Oh! Don't you like sales?"

"Mother buys things at them," Pip imparted gravely. She realised what a country cousin she was, and asked for no further information.

Pauline looked up from her circular.

"I shall be gone all day — don't let the Derrys worry

you, Miss Alliston — they're not to have cayenne pepper with the wild duck — Pip, you're all to do some lessons this morning — Jem, you are *sure* this clock is right?"

"It's still five minutes fast, my dear."

"Don't! It's *right*, remember. Miss Alliston, would you mind just looking in and seeing that the Derrys do some lessons? Pip knows. Only they don't always do them. — *Is. 11¾d.* the yard — was *5s. 11¾d.*" Her voice died away into a rapt murmur.

Bunny paid no visits to the kitchen clock that morning. At twenty-eight minutes past eight, according to the clock on the mantel-shelf, he slid from his chair. "Walkin'-stick or yumbrellah?"

In vain Jem protested that he had still five minutes. Bunny stood squarely before him, seized his arm, and pulled.

"Come!" he frowned.

Jem rose laughing.

"Pauline, the loss of my last precious five minutes I owe to you!"

Soon after his departure Pauline jumped up in a flurry, and left the room to go and put on her "things." In a few minutes she was down again.

"I'm late — I *must* catch the 9.15 — No, Cherub, you can't come with me! Oh, don't howl, darling — See what mummy will bring you home — Go away, Stentor — not now — Bunny, I don't want my umbrella —"

Hesky appeared. "Please, Ma'am, am I to make —"

"Oh, make what you like, Hesky!"

Pauline hurried past her.

"And if the man comes about that door, Ma'am —?"

But she was down the path. From the gate she waved. "Darlings, be good! Don't worry Miss Alliston! Pip, don't forget the lessons!"

Pip shut the hall door, and the Derrys went back to the dining-room, where the Cherub sat howling lustily. Helen managed to soothe him, then retired to the den to look up a reference that she wanted.

"Miss Alliston, the groceries have n't come, and Hesky wants some currants."

"Can't she make something without currants, Pip?"

Pip's eyes gleamed.

"You'd better not ask her. She's as obstinate as a donkey without a tail when she's cross, and she's awfully cross to-day because mother didn't give her any orders, and she's terrified what mums may bring her this time. Last time," reflectively, "it was a coal-scuttle with a lid that sticks because it's bent, and will never open propelly."

The whole contingent, except the Cherub, went escorted by Stentor to fetch the currants. Helen's conscience bade her follow the Wild Indians or Animals from the Jungle upstairs to superintend their getting ready. After half an hour's wrestling with lost overcoats and gloves and boots, she wished limply that she was possessed of a phosphorescent conscience like Bubbles', or that the question of raiment for the Derrys were as beautifully simple a matter as in the case of Stentor.

"Oh, Derrys," she exclaimed, "I wish you needed no more 'getting ready' than Stentor!"

"Would you like us to have four feet?" Bubbles queried, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Five fours are twenty," reckoned up Pip. "Fancy having to find twenty boots!"

Helen's eye travelled to the boot cupboard. In its dark depths chaos reigned. Boots and shoes, old and new, big and little, were jumbled in a hopeless confusion. A good deal of the half-hour's wrestling had taken place in that cupboard. Helen, kneeling before it, seeking in vain for various boots described by the Derrys, had caught sight of a piece of cardboard stuck jauntily at the back. She pulled it up by the one corner exposed, and saw that it bore printing on it. It had been standing on its head; she righted it, and read, in great black letters — "Order is Heaven's first law."

"Great-Aunt Priscilla fixed that up in the cupboard last time she stayed here," Pip had observed nonchalantly.

It had struck Helen as very comical.

That was a full day. She marvelled that Pauline's absence should make such a difference till Pip's amused little dark face, as she said, "I 'spect if mummy ramped about after us like you do, she'd be worn to skinny bone!" enlightened her.

"But," she rejoined, "surely your Mother would not allow you to play in the coal-cellar?"

"I 'spect she just would n't notice," Pip exclaimed airily.

"Well, anyhow, you had better all come and do your lessons now."

"All right," Pip acquiesced.

"I'll come and see how you are getting on soon. Mrs. Derrington said you could look after the others, Pip."

"Oh, yes; I do. I've been to the kindergarten, you see."

She watched them assemble in the morning-room; settled the Cherub on the rug with a box of bricks, then went upstairs to the den with a sigh of relief.

She sat down and drew her portfolio to her. She banished the thought of unappreciative editors. She looked round at the book-lined walls, and gave a little sigh of content. Her nib was worn to just the point she liked; the sheets of paper lay, fair and white, waiting for her to pen them with her thoughts. In a minute she was bending over them—absorbed. Presently weird noises stole in upon her absorption; they worried, then roused her. She rose with a little frown and a sigh; she was very deep in a story.

She went down to the morning-room. The noise was deafening; wild, awful gurglings and ear-piercing screams assailed her ears. She opened the door unnoticed, and stood appalled.

Her eye fell first on Bubbles. He was attired in towels: his head was bound, turban fashion, in a towel; another towel was draped artistically about his slim body. His face was smeared in ghastly fashion with coal interspersed with streaks of red paint; the same colouring appeared smearily on his bare legs and arms.

Bunny was attired with savage simplicity in a duster.

Pip, Dulcie, and Peggy, clad in odd scraps of old finery of Pauline's, cowered behind a table, emitting terrified screams.

Bubbles, performing a wild acrobatic feat accompanied by savage yells, caught sight of her, and further astonished her by exclaiming dramatically, "Are you awake!"

She felt rather indignant; she explained, dignifiedly,

that she had not been asleep; whereupon Peggy, finery and all, subsided beneath the table, shrieking with mirth.

Helen shut the door and surveyed the room and its occupants.

"Is this the way you always do your lessons?" she asked in a long-suffering tone. She was not much surprised when Pip assured her earnestly that it was.

"Would you mind explaining the system?" She looked down blandly from her height — leaning back against the door — upon Pip.

Pip's gaze met hers solemnly from beneath a hat-brim laden with faded pink roses.

"It's self-tittion," she explained glibly; "and you mustn't learn like a parrot, you know. The old evil cistern of learning by rote is done away with. Nowadays the little ones are taught to *re'lise* things by *acting* and *seeing* —"

"Oh; and may I ask what you are acting now?"

"The natives of Fiji," — Pip was evidently quoting, — "the natives of Fiji are a fine race, many of them exceeding six feet. They are very proud of their hair. Some of the chiefs —" an acrobatic feat on Bubbles' part — "wear turbans to protect their hair. These turbans are made of bark-cloth, which is also used for their dresses. In former times they were great canny-balls —" horrible noises from Bubbles and Bunny — "but canny-balls-ism has nearly died out now, owing to the praiseworthy efforts of the ex'lent missionaries —"

Interruption from Bubbles —

"I would I wear a Cassywary  
On the sands of Timbuctoo  
I would eat a missionary  
Skin an' bone an' hymn-book too!"

"On meeting in the morning, a common sallyutation is 'Awake!' or 'Are you awake!'" Pip's eloquence was interrupted by a protesting complaint —

"Oh, that's anuff, Pip!" from Dulcie.

"I know some more," Pip suggested, looking expectantly at Helen.

"I think that will do," Helen said; "but still I don't quite see —"

"*We* are Fijians," cried Bubbles, gambolling forward, "and *they* are mere English ladies, waitin' to know whether they're going to be made into hash for dinner, or carried off by us for wives —"

"We are re'*living* how the Fijians live," Pip put in.

Bunny's plump little figure coming towards her, the duster, being rather small, tying him in ludicrously, was the last straw. Helen leant against the door, and gave way to laughter.

"All the same," she said presently, trying to achieve the judicious dignity she had lost, "it is not lessons."

"It's kindergarten lessons," Pip declared with the air of one who knows.

"Have you ever been to a kindergarten?" asked Bubbles.

Helen had not; so the Derrys scored there.

However, being on the whole an amiable contingent, they agreed to give up this particular form of "self-tittion"; and departed upstairs to undress, and dress, and wash.

The Cherub slept placidly in his rug.

"I was going to have him as my papoose when I'd married Bubbles," Pip said.

Helen carried him upstairs and put him to bed. She lingered over the process — he was such a fair, fat, round bit of a Cherub.

Pip came tearing into the room for the key of the door. Helen inquired what she wanted it for.

"The boys are having aquatic sports in the bath-room — it's our turn now — I want to see if this key will open the door —"

"Pip, you are to go down and do some lessons at once. I will see about the boys."

Pip looked rebellious. She frowned. "You're not our governess," she muttered.

"Your mother asked me to see that you did your lessons. Go down to the morning-room, Pip."

Pip hesitated. She looked at Helen defiantly; then she turned and marched downstairs to the morning-room. Helen drew a comical breath of relief.

"If that imp had known how terrified I was that she would refuse to go!"



She extracted, through the bath-room door, a promise from Bubbles and Bunny that they would dress as quickly as possible, and then, taking Dulcie and Peggy with her, she went down to the morning-room.

Pip was there, seated at the table, drawing on a slate.

"What are you doing, Pip?"

"Drawing the dog that belongs to the man in the moon."

"Pip," patiently, "you know that is not doing your lessons."

"It's the kindergarten cistern. I wanted to re'lise the moon-man's dog."

"Well, we will have a little dictation now."

She set copies for Dulcie and Peggy; then began Pip's dictation.

"My pen's too thick."

Delay — search — change of nib.

"My pen's too thin."

"You can't have anything between the two, Philippa."

A look of grim satisfaction overspread Pip's face at that "Philippa."

"I'd sooner have the thick one then."

Change once more, at the expense of very inky fingers.

Helen began — "In the hut at the foot of the hill —"

"I have n't wrote dictation at the top yet."

A long pause. Careful formation of every letter, careful line ruled beneath.

Then Helen — "In the hut at the foot of the hill —"

"You go much too quick! I have n't wrote 'In the' yet."

"In—the—hut—at—the—foot—of—the—hill—"

"I've done ages ago! I can't write so slowly."

Helen put the book down.

"You will write in *silence*, Philippa; do you understand? If you have to wait, wait in silence."

A nod.

The lesson proceeded. When it was finished Philippa handed up her book with a gleam in her dark eyes.

The dictation was written frighfully; blots adorned it everywhere; beyond this it read queerly:

"In the hut at the foot of the hill in silens an old man lived a solitary life in silens. His wife had died in silens

## IN THE DERRY EDITORIAL ROOM

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many years ago in silens, and since then he had lived in silens with no companions in silens — ” and so on.

Helen looked up from it.

“ You can go, Philippa.”

Pip frowned.

“ You *told* me to write in silence — so every time I had to wait — ”

“ I know all about it. You were trying to be funny. I do not want to hear, and I will not teach you any more.”

“ Hurrah! ” cried Pip, and flung her dictation book to the other end of the room.

Peggy gave a frightened little giggle.

Dulcie looked on with wide, shocked eyes.

Pip turned at the door. A storm of passion swept across her small face as she caught sight of Dulcie. “ Go on, goody-goo! Do your lessons and say ‘ thank you ’! Oh, you hateful — contemptshus — *beastly* little goody-goo! ” and she flung away, banging the door behind her.

Dulcie was not as saintly as she looked. To Helen’s surprise, she sprang up, her face scarlet, and made for the door. “ Beast! *Lemon-pip!* ” she shrilled. Helen caught her arm and held her. She wriggled angrily. “ She called me a goody-goo! Let me go! ”

Helen managed to quiet her, and then the boys appeared.

“ Oh, Jerry, what ’s happened to old Pip? ” exclaimed Bubbles.

To Helen, hot, vexed with herself that she was troubling over these Derrys, who did n’t belong to her, Bubbles and Bunny, pink, fresh, damp-headed, appeared irresistible.

“ You ’re going to show me what you can do, ” she said, with a confident smile.

Bunny smiled back again. “ Oom, ” he said; “ lets? Figs? ”

“ He means letters — figures, ” whispered Peggy.

“ Letters first, dear. ”

“ May I write an essay? ” Bubbles asked.

“ He just writes a tale if you say yes, ” Dulcie observed crossly; she had not yet recovered her temper.

“ I ’ll write a tale to you — like an ode, ” Bubbles insinuated to Helen.

"I want to see how you can manage dictation."

He sighed.

"I admit, O beauteous one! Your law is my will."

Helen, dictating to Bubbles, let her eye rest often on Bunny, and her teacher's soul was refreshed thereby.

Bunny sat doubled up over his letters, — a queer little bundle, with his slate resting on his brown knees. He was absorbed, earnest; his small fingers clutched the slate-pencil, he formed every stroke with slow, laborious care. At the finish of every letter he paused, and regarded it anxiously, head on one side, from beneath frowning brows. If it were to his liking his face crinkled and dimpled into a beaming smile; if it were not, his whole body heaved with the sigh he gave.

Bubble's dictation was written in his own peculiar style, — airy, careless, decidedly original. He wrote quickly, never pausing for thought; occasionally a letter turned its back on its brethren when it should have confronted them, and many were adorned with curly heads and tails, invented by himself, to vary the monotony.

Pip appeared for dinner with a black demon in either eye; she was dirty, her hair rough.

Helen sent her up to her room to wash. Then she followed her.

"Pip," her voice was irresistible, "let's make it up."

The stiff little back presented to her view as Pip washed her hands did not unbend.

"You know you don't want to —" Pip said sullenly; "you know you don't like me —"

"Pip," Helen came closer, "why, what made you think that? Do you think I'd give up caring about you because you were a tiresome little monkey one morning?"

Pip scrubbed her nails energetically.

"You like Dulcie — because she's so pretty and — and —"

"Oh, Pip! You know that's silly. I like you both."

"You like Dulcie heaps best. She'd never be rude and beastly like I was this morning — I am sometimes — I don't know why — you *can't* like me, really —"

Helen put her arm round the thin little neck and kissed her.

## IN THE DERRY EDITORIAL ROOM

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"Now, Pip," she said tenderly, "surely you'll believe I like you when I've kissed such a dirty little face as that!"

Pip's answer was curious. She bent her face low over the basin, till her dark hair hid it, and she said curtly, "Will you go now, please?"

Helen, understanding, went.

A few minutes later a shining, scrubbed Pip entered the dining-room hilariously. "Hi, Bubbles, leave me a little of that duck!"

Her eyes avoided Helen's shyly.

"It's spotted dog for puddin'," Bubbles observed; "do you like spotted dog, Miss Alliston?"

Helen had a horrible vision of a Dalmatian on a pudding dish.

"I've never seen it," she said.

"It is n't bad sometimes; it depends on Hesky. Sometimes it's a pedigree dog, and then it's fine, and sometimes, if Hesky's in a wax, it's just a mongrel, and then it's beastly."

She did not feel attracted towards the pudding in either case. When Hesky brought it in, and set it before her, — pale, flabby, interspersed with a very occasional currant, — she still felt no attraction towards it.

"It's a mongrel," Bubbles said sadly.

She did not taste the "spotted dog" herself.

The Cherub conceived a deep affection for her; she had to be always on the alert, or a sticky spoon would be thrust affectionately against her cheek; he embraced her wildly at intervals, with gurglings of deep love.

Pip looked on with awe.

"He does n't gen'rally do that," she said; "he's very exclusive."

After dinner the glow of the great red fire gave Helen an inspiration.

"Bubbles!" She whispered to him, and with several emphatic nods, and clutching something put into his hand, he fled from the room, Stentor fleeing with him.

The next instant she saw him careering down the path just as he was, in his overall and house-shoes, and hatless. Evidently the Derrys never caught cold, and just as evidently no one at the "Red Cottage" cared for "appearances."

## HELEN ALLISTON

She watched with serene enjoyment the airy flight of the slim figure down the road. He was performing fancy steps for his own enjoyment, and Stentor's. She thought he was the very embodiment of happiness.

They passed a cosy afternoon, roasting chestnuts, and telling stories.

Helen, with the Cherub asleep on her lap, the Derrys sprawled around her, her stories received with a flattering enthusiasm, felt a sense of well-being, of content.

Pauline came home just before tea-time, exhausted.

"Oh, how *rude* some women are!" she ejaculated as she sank limply into a chair; "glorious bargains — being sent on —"

"Is it magneeshum this time, Mums?" Bubbles queried anxiously.

"Oh, no, sweet. Lovely things, — silks — ties — stockings, — wonderful bargains!"

Helen looked on with interest. A sale to her was a name only.

That night when she went to bed she found on her toilet table a little clump of papers. The writing was Pip's, laboriously neat; it began, "In the hut at the foot of the hill," and went on down to the end of that morning's dictation lesson. Every word was spelled correctly, and at the foot of the last page was written, "I have wrote this without lookin I lernt it first please dont menton it, yours faithfully Pip."

The next day the bargains arrived.

The Derrys collected. Helen followed them to the morning-room, where Pauline, excited and proud, was cutting ruthlessly through knots. From the first parcel she dragged forth piles of yellowy-brown stockings.

"There! Guess how much? My dear, 8s. 6d. the dozen pairs! Do imagine it! Feel them, — nice and thick, yet fine, — good, strong, cashmere"; she was opening another parcel, "and do look at this tie — 1s. 11¾d. — for myself!"

Helen eyed it gravely. "It's very pretty," she said.

"Yes. Heliotrope does n't really suit me, but they had n't it in other colours; and it has been 3s. 11¾d. at least. And I got beautiful things for Hesky. Pudding dishes —"

"Oh, things for Hesky!" Pip's face brightened; "how nice, Mums!"

"Odd jugs and dishes — basins — and a new egg-whisk," enumerated Pauline; "they've not come yet."

"Is there anything else for us, Mums?" Bubbles inquired anxiously.

Helen, newly comprehensive, eyed him sympathetically.

"Oh, yes, pet."

Bubbles' face fell. Helen glanced along the row of faces, and saw that all had fallen, save the Cherub's. Even Peggy looked chastened.

"Oh, I had a fine time," Pauline went on; "beautiful kid gloves for Bubbles and Bunny. You know you floated yours in the bath last week, and ruined them"; she held out two pairs of small tan gloves.

Bunny eyed them suspiciously, from force of habit. But Bubbles ejaculated in horror, "They're *girls'* gloves, Mums! They've got *four buttons!*"

"Oh, well, pet, that won't show — your sleeves will hide them, and they had n't any at the same price with one or two buttons. They were 1s. 6¾d. the pair — reduced from 2s. 11¾d. They were the only two pairs they had left!"

Bunny backed frowningly from the gloves, his hands clasped tightly behind his back. Bubbles sighed heavily, and grew more pensive.

"And look at these dear little mats I bought for my girlies," Pauline chattered on, producing some small white mats; "you're so bad at needle-work, dears, and you ought to begin to try and improve. You shall embroider them for Aunt Priscilla."

"Won't it be rather too difficult?" Helen suggested, seeking a loop-hole for the stricken Derrys.

"Oh, they'll make mistakes, of course, but I'll help them —"

A gleam lit Pip's intelligent face.

"Mother, is n't it a pity to spoil them like that? Sha'n't we wait till we're *grown-up?*"

"Oh, yes, Mammy sweet," seconded Dulcie.

Peggy wagged her yellow head.

"Yes, we'll wait," she said, and her serious mouth widened into one of her beaming smiles.

But Dulcie whispered tragically, "There's a big bottle in that other parcel!" and Peggy's face sobered again.

Always optimistic, the next moment she suggested beamingly, "We'll take the med'cine when we're wummins, too, won't we, Mummy?"

"What medicine? Oh, that's not medicine — I'm coming to that in a moment. These mats were only 9¾ *d.* the set," she explained to Helen; "so, even if they are spoilt, it won't matter much. That bottle," picking up another parcel, "is a large bottle of Kailey's Glycerine — a wonderful bargain —"

"What's it for, mums?" Bubbles inquired anxiously.

"Why, I noticed yesterday that some of your hands were a wee bit rough, pets, and when you wash them, you are to rub in a little of this glycerine."

A gasp went the round of the Derrys.

"Every time we wash, mother?"

"Oh, it won't take a minute."

"It's sticky, is n't it?" Pip inquired gloomily.

"Yes; but you won't notice that."

Pauline looked round triumphantly on the bargains strewn over the table.

"Those are just cooking-aprons for me; and these are some white pinnies for Peggy and Dulcie, and that's a collar — is n't it charming?"

Helen examined the articles, while the Derrys stood by, looking on.

Suddenly Pip's eyes sparkled.

"Mother," her eager little voice stumbled breathlessly, "had n't you better send Bubbles and Bunny to a blue-coat school? And then they would have the stockings all ready, you see, and it would save you having to buy any —"

Pauline eyed her severely.

"Philip, I believe you are a vain little girl. I believe you don't like the poor stockings. I'm very hurt."

"Oh, Mother!"

"Mammy love!"

"*Dear* mummy!"

They hurled themselves upon her, and Stentor hurled himself with them, and distributed indiscriminate licks.

## LIFE AT THE "RED COTTAGE"

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Later on, Helen came upon a group of Derrys; they were talking together earnestly.

"Gloves," quoth Bubbles, "are easily got rid of."

"Float?" queried Bunny.

"Splits this time, I think," answered Bubbles; "and that old glyssine — we 'll smash the bottle, you see," cheerfully.

"But how 'bout our mats?" asked Dulcie dismally.

"We 'll have to use scissors," explained Pip; "so we 'll cut them up!"

Helen retreated softly.

"They 're not *my* Derrys!"

Afterwards she pondered on the enigma — where did Pauline's sense of humour vanish to, during the sales?

She never solved the riddle.

## CHAPTER VI

### LIFE AT THE "RED COTTAGE"

FOR the first few days at the "Red Cottage" Helen wrote only when Pauline was out, and the Derrys safely out of the way. Then she invaded the den, and luxuriated. But after the first few days she told herself she was absurd; she locked her bedroom door and wrote. She was interrupted a good deal; and the fact of her door being locked caused great amazement amongst the Derrys.

"Hesky says she believes you 're up to no good," Bubbles told her.

"I 'm afraid it 's true, Bubbles."

His eyes shone.

"What are you doing?" he sidled close up to her. "I say, do tell me," he urged; "I won't tell — honest Injun."

She laughed.

He pondered with an earnest face. "I 'll give you my bit of red sealing-wax, — it 's a long bit, — well, then, I 'll take an oath not to tell — Black Hugo's oath."

But she only laughed.

"It 's a most *awful* oath," Bubbles persisted; "do you swing on the bed-post?"



"No, I don't do that."

"You try — when the door's locked — you know. It's glorious. You tie a towel — a *big* towel — or a sheet's better — only it's more expensive, 'cause they always tear, you see — round you, and then tie it on to the bed-post, and hang, and swing. I know what you do," he broke off excitedly; "you make camps of matches, and blow them up!"

One evening she met him wandering on the landing; he was clad in a white nightgown too long for him; he looked very mysterious and angelic.

"I'm keepin' awake," he said.

"Why?"

"For a reason."

"That nightgown does n't belong to you, does it?"

"No; I tore my piggys, and I could n't find any more, so I took a nightie of Pip's. Do I look like an angel?"

He spread out his arms as if flying, and raised his eyes.

"Why should you?"

"They always wear long white nighties, 'cept the ones that have n't any bodies, you know. I like the whole ones the best, don't you? Dulcie says the heads are the *new* angels that have only just arrived in heaven, and the bodies grow after. But I don't believe it, else why are n't there any *half*-bodies, with only one arm and leg — Do you think they roll themselves up in a little white cloud while they grow — like chrissylisses —"

"Bubbles, go back to bed! Are n't you ever cold?"

He shook his head. "'Cept when I've been bad."

That night, as she was brushing out her hair, there was a gentle little tap on her door. She rose and opened it. Bubbles stood outside; his face fell. "Oh, you're not in bed yet! By Jerry, what glorious hair!" he broke off admiringly.

"What do you want? Don't you ever sleep, Bubbles?"

"I kept awake on purpose. May I come in?"

"Just to tell me what you want."

He walked in, holding up Pip's nightgown in a bundle in front. Helen, seeing his thin little bare toes, lifted him on to her bed, and laughing, covered his feet with her bedroom slippers.

## LIFE AT THE "RED COTTAGE"

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"Thank you," he said politely; "I like it in here. You're very nice, are n't you?"

"Am I? I'm glad you think so, Bubbles."

"It's not dark yet, you see," with a sigh; "may I stay here till you're in bed?"

"No, dear."

"Well, could you put the candle out — no, that won't do. I think I'll go now, thank you."

He slipped from the bed.

She caught his slim shoulder.

"Tell me why you came, Bubbles."

"No; I'll come again when you're in bed. Good-night."

He wriggled his shoulder, but she held on firmly.

"If you come again, it will do no good. I lock my door, and I shall not open it."

"How unkind," he sighed.

She felt she was a cruel wretch, but she kept silence.

"I wanted to come at your sorry time," he explained in a mournful little voice, "so's you would tell me then what you do when your door's locked."

"Oh!"

He stood and waited anxiously.

"Are n't you just a *little* bit sorry?" he coaxed.

"Bubbles," in a moment she took the plunge, "I write stories."

There was a pause.

"Is — that — *all*?" he gasped.

She nodded.

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun."

"Why, I do that!"

The disappointment in face and voice was so deep that she felt herself inadequate to cope with it.

"I write poetry and stories and plays," he observed, when he had recovered. "What do you write? Only stories?"

"Generally."

"In maggyseens, like dad?"

"No, Bubbles; in envelopes, — great, big, ugly envelopes."

"Dad writes those sort, too; he does n't like them. Once

he said 'Damn' when the postman brought him one like that. We must n't say 'Damn,' you know; so we say," — he lifted his Millais face, — "we say '*Dam*—son jam!' Is n't it a good way?"

Helen lay that night and faced the thought of the morrow. To-morrow she would be known as a writer of stories that no editor would accept; to-morrow her secret would be public property; to-morrow Pauline, or even Jem, might ask to read some story of hers. Till now, Augustus had been the only person, beyond Lilian, who had read anything of hers. She had been forced to give him two stories. She shivered now at the thought of his criticism, his advice. Would these people be like that? Pick her work to pieces in a superior voice, with a superior smile? Give her a word of condescending praise, perhaps? No, she knew they would not. And, anyway, her secret would have had to come out some time. Any day, by any post, a big envelope containing two stories that she had sent off three days ago might come for her. "But," ruefully, "my secret might have been mine for six or seven weeks, oh, editors!"

From her writing her thoughts went to Lilian. She had had one ecstatic letter from her, singing Augustus' praises — full of Augustusisms from beginning to end.

It had saddened her a little, though she had known already how they had drifted apart. She felt a warm gratitude to the Derrys.

Bubbles announced her secret at breakfast the next morning. He announced it with a scornful intonation — "She only writes!"

Jem looked at her with twinkling eyes.

"That 'only' is scathing, Miss Alliston. He's hard on us poor authors, is n't he?"

Pauline was studying an announcement of a forthcoming sale. She glanced up.

"You'll be able to use the den," she said, and resumed her reading of the wonderful bargains in blouses.

Helen turned to Jem. "I'm not entitled to the name of 'Author.' I — I have had nothing accepted —"

## LIFE AT THE "RED COTTAGE"

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"Yet," he added kindly, "perhaps I shall be able to help a little — I mean as to which magazines to send your work to. I'm an old stager — I've been through it all. I should very much like to see something you have written — if you don't mind," he added diffidently.

"I am afraid it is you who will mind," she laughed.

He smiled. "Oh, no. All men are selfish, you know; I should n't have asked unless I felt sure I should be interested."

"But — but really —"

"Walkin'-stick or yumbrellah?" Bunny stood squarely before his father.

He rose with a little laugh. "The chicken-pecked father!"

After breakfast, in a tumult of feelings, she looked over her stories. She rejected one after the other, till not one was left. Then modestly she put aside one short sketch — "A Winter's Idyll" it was called.

When Jem read it she was not present.

"I don't want to be there while the gibbet's being put up," she laughed to Pauline.

A while after, a stentorian shout echoed over the house for Miss Alliston.

Shiveringly she went out on to the landing, and met Jem bounding up the stairs. He held out his hand with a warm, kindly smile. "I was right," he said; "give me some more, will you?"

She went into her room, and fetched another story.

He shook his head impatiently.

"How niggardly you are! Are you afraid I shall steal your ideas?" he said irritably, though he smiled.

She hurried back, and gave him several. "That's better. Remember, you asked for a frank criticism."

"Yes."

She watched him go down, laden with her manuscript; she turned to re-enter her room with a whimsical smile.

"Oh, brazen Helen!"

Afterwards he gave her the criticism.

"I like your style," he said; "it's fresh — original — sometimes its originality is against its being accepted, I expect. But go on; don't smooth it down. You're too

sketchy often for magazines. Your stories would work into a charming book."

He paused and looked at her musingly.

Her cheeks were flushed with the soft creamy pink that always came into her face with any emotion of gladness; she was leaning a little towards him; the lamplight shone on the waves of her dark hair, her eyes looked up at him earnestly.

"Paul," he said, "don't you wish Lester were here?"

Pauline nodded. "Oh, those folds!" she cried, looking at Helen's black gown. "Child, how beautifully you sit!" Helen's laugh rippled out. It struck her as ludicrous for that scrap of a Pauline to call her "child."

"Oh, folds!" Jem said; "you're only a woman, after all, Pauline."

"Only!" Helen said. "Who is Lester?"

"Jack Lester—the portrait painter. Don't say you don't know him, Miss Alliston; his friendship for us is the glory of the 'Red Cottage.' We drag it out when Mrs. Vicar calls, and Miss—Curate. It is the one and only honour we possess!"

"You need n't mind me! I'm horribly, disgracefully ignorant."

"I don't believe it. Now, I have n't marked your work, because a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, you know, and I rave when some beastly editor sends back an article scored all over with hieroglyphics for his own edification—certainly not for mine. But here—" he took up a story, and turned back the leaves—"I don't like that. The whole episode is n't effective enough; it's tame. Don't you think it would be better to make Eleanor waiting for him—looking out for him—in the Tower Chamber?"

There was a pause. The pink in her cheek deepened. "I'm sorry," she said deprecatingly, "but I don't."

"Why? It would be much more effective—"

"Yes, at the risk of truth."

"How?"

"She would n't *dare*; don't you remember that she is bearing up, — *acting a part*, — so that no one shall guess her interest in the absent Rupert. Do you think she would

dare risk a visit to the place where all her happy memories lie — "

"Oh, that's hypercritical! She could choose a time when no one was about, and anyhow, how should any one guess *why* she went there?"

"I — you don't understand what I mean."

"Well, explain, then."

"I mean," in a low voice, "that she would not dare let herself go — even for a moment — that she knows she must act — *act always* — that if she went to the Tower, she would break down. She knows her strength lies in keeping memories at arm's length — she knows she must not indulge for a moment in looking back."

"She's right, Jem," Pauline said.

"I had n't thought of it like that. After all, women can write of women as men never can. You are right, Miss Alliston, but *still* I don't care quite for that chapter, and don't you think you might suggest why she does n't go to the Tower? Men will read the story, you know — "

"Only editors," she laughed.

"I'm not so sure."

"I'll alter it. I think myself it's colourless."

He criticised some more of her work, and when they parted for the night he shook hands heartily. "Have I been rude and a boor? You have been most patient, and if I've been rude, you must forgive me. I got interested, you know, and when you're interested civilisation falls away like a flung-off mantle."

"You have been most kind," she said earnestly; "you have given up all your evening to me. I don't know how to thank you — "

Pauline laughed.

"Oh, my dear, go to bed. Jem will get so puffed-up the 'Red Cottage' won't be large enough to hold him."

A few nights later Helen was writing up in her room. It was a bitterly cold night. Laying down her pen, as she came to the end of a chapter, she cast a grateful thought to the "Red Cottage" way of looking upon everything as natural. No one said, or even looked, anything when she deserted Jem's warm, comfortable room, and chose to write

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up in her bedroom, with frozen fingers. She had done it diffidently the first time, hating to appear affected, struggling against the longing to be alone. There were times in her writing when she felt she must be alone, and evidently Pauline and Jem thought it natural enough, though Jem never experienced the feeling himself.

She did not want to write any more that night. As she sat musing, she heard the sound of the piano; she rose, went out on to the landing and listened. Voices came from the drawing-room; a chorus rang out charmingly:

“And I expect you ’ll all agree  
That he was right to so decree,  
And I am right,  
And you are right,  
And all is right as right can be!”

She hurried down. The drawing-room door was ajar; she pushed it open and went in.

Jem, in his overcoat, sat at the piano, his legs twisted wildly round the stool. Pauline was leaning back in a chair, wrapped in a shawl, cuddling into the cushions, singing lustily.

Bubbles, a red eider-down over his pyjamas, bare-footed, sang with upturned face. Pip and Dulcie, rolled up together in a blanket, sang too. The room was fireless, and icy cold.

Helen stood and laughed. Bubbles, seeing her, opened out the eider-down politely, and without pausing in his song. She accepted the invitation, and Bubbles, singing, stood on tip-toe, to bring the eider-down as high as possible about her.

The last chorus was sung:

“And they were right, I think you ’ll say  
To argue in this kind of way.  
And I am right,  
And you are right,  
And all is right — too — looral — lay!”

Jem turned round.

“Have my coat, Miss Alliston?”

“I am beautifully warm, thank you.”

## LIFE AT THE "RED COTTAGE"

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Dulcie suggested coaxingly, "Our blanket's ever so nice."

A tubby figure — a round bundle of blankets — trotted in a business-like way into the room. From the blankets a voice said, with deep joy, "Enter Pooh-Bah!"

"Come on," said Pip, "we're going to have 'The Flowers that Bloom in the Spring.'"

"Come here, pet." Bunny trotted up to Pauline.

"Have 'The Crimmy ball cried, as he dropped him down'?" he queried, with bloodthirsty eagerness.

"All in good time, Bunny."

They had it next. Then some one suggested that Bubbles should sing "A Wandering Minstrel."

"Would you like me to play the accompaniment?" Helen asked Jem.

He rose with alacrity.

"Thanks, awfully. I'd much sooner only shout." He pointed. "There it is."

Bubbles' beautiful voice rose plaintively:

"A wandering minstrel I —  
A thing of shreds and patches,  
Of ballads, songs and snatches,  
And dreamy lullaby!"

In the middle of the first verse he came close, and draped half of his eider-down round Helen's shoulders, singing as he did it.

After the "Mikado" they had "Pinafore" and "The Pirates of Penzance."

At eleven o'clock Helen looked round and smiled. Bunny lay curled up in a chair fast asleep. Dulcie and Pip slept cosily in their blanket on the floor. Only Bubbles, of the Derrys, was wide awake still, and anxious for "more."

Jem shut the piano with a firm hand. Pauline yawned contentedly. "We've had our fill," she said.

Long before this Jem had fetched Pauline's golf cape for Helen; she had been snug and happy. She laughed as she looked at the diminished singers.

"Pip and Dulcie succumbed together only a quarter of an hour ago," Pauline said. "Bubbles, be off to bed."

Bubbles was eyeing Helen thoughtfully.



"Why won't you sing solo?" he asked.

Terror dwelt in her eye.

"Oh, I? I don't sing. Good-night, dear."

"It's wicked to tell fibs. You do sing, because I heard you; you sing soft and beautiful."

Jem laughed out.

"There's no hoodwinking the Derrys, Miss Alliston. You sing. It's an established fact."

"An established fiction, you mean. I'm going to bed. Good-night."

## CHAPTER VII

### A LITERARY SUCCESS

HELEN'S envelope stories came back to her with irritating regularity.

Jem laughed at her shamefacedness over them; and when he received a similar package waved it brazenly before her.

"You must get hardened, Miss Alliston. You'll never do for the literary profession unless you do."

Then one morning — it was a dreary, cold morning in early February — she received a letter — oh, blessed little letter! — in a *small* envelope. It was thrust beneath her bedroom door by a Derry, accompanied by the salutation, "I bid thee good-morning, O Lady of Beauty!" by which she guessed the Derry was Bubbles.

She picked up the letter; it wore an editorial look. She flushed nervously as she opened it slowly, very slowly.

It was an acceptance of her story, "The Wiles of William," by the editor of the *Monthly Literature*. She sat there, on the edge of her bed, tingling with the sudden joy of it. The feeling that perhaps now she was justified in indulging her longing to write was beautiful. For weeks she had been struggling against despair; and now — she rose, with a long breath, and went slowly downstairs. In the hall she met Jem. She smiled shyly. "I —"

"I congratulate you!" he cried heartily. "Which is it?"

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"How did you know?"

He smiled. "You tell more than you think. Is it 'Eleanor'?"

"No. 'The Wiles of William'—for the *Monthly Literature*."

"Ah, good magazine—very. Now, I hope some one will take 'Eleanor'—it *should* be taken—and things often happen like that."

Later on she said happily, "I'm to be paid on publication. I wonder when it will be published? I long to see who illustrates it. Am I too late for the March number, do you think?"

He looked at her pityingly.

"Oh, yes."

"I daresay it will be in the April then?"

He was silent.

Pip's shrill voice interposed.

"Oh, *no*, Miss Alliston! Why, it very likely won't come out for over a *year*!"

Jem looked vexed. "It's true that you can never rely on its appearing soon," he said gently.

"But—a *year*!"

"Sometimes. Editors have stones in their bosoms, and blanks where their consciences ought to be. But of course, it may be sooner," he added consolingly.

Helen sighed. She spread marmalade thoughtfully on a piece of toast. She was wondering how she was to live, with editors as her pay-masters. She could not face the thought of going forth from the land of the Derrys. Yet she saw that she must earn money in some quicker and more remunerative way than by writing; or else, how could she stay in Derryland? She was upheld by the delightful feeling that she need no longer consider it a waste of time to write. She had a right to do it now. Upheld by that, she faced unflinchingly the thought of drumming music into small pupils; teaching them the three R's; going out daily to read to an old lady—any and every possible way of earning a little money, so that she could stay in Derryland, and write.

But by the time she had eaten her piece of toast she had put aside such thoughts, for that day at least. Should she

spoil the day of her entrance into the world of literature by such mundane considerations?

"Derrys," she said, "we'll do something to celebrate my début in the literary world. Make suggestions, Derrys!"

Suggestions poured upon her; from a visit to King Edward to a visit to the Zoo. The latter suggestion was decided upon.

Helen entered into the preparations as joyfully as any of the Derrys. She had never been to the Zoölogical Gardens. Oh, joy, the Derrys would show her everything!

"I like it better in the winter than summer," Pip told her, "because the animals are so lovely and want things so —"

"People don't go so much in the winter to feed them, you see," Bubbles finished.

They had an early lunch at twelve, and started off for the station at half-past. The only shadow on their going was Stentor. All the time the Derrys were getting ready, throughout the noisy luncheon, Stentor padded sadly and slowly from one to the other; he employed all the arts he knew of to coax them into taking him. He shook hands wildly with every one; he said "please" till his paw must have ached; he performed wondrous leaps in the air to bestow a kiss on a head or cheek, and he stood and rested his beautiful head on any article of furniture that came handy, eyeing the hard-hearted humans about him with such melting sadness that Helen found herself cudgelling her brains for some other place to go, where Stentor might come too.

Finally they left him sitting enveloped in a sad dignity in the doorway beside Pauline and the Cherub, watching their departure, and in response to urgings from her, slowly and majestically waving a lackadaisical paw.

When Helen came back late that afternoon she said to Pauline, "Please count them! And their fingers and toes, too!"

And Pauline laughed unsympathetically.

The hall was filled with a Babel of Derryisms; it took her some time to make her command — "Go and wash, Derrys!" — heeded.

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Helen was the first down.

"No, my hair is n't grey. I'm surprised; but I've learnt a great deal of natural history to-day. Oh, they were very charming!"

Pauline laughed.

"I know. I've been to the Zoo with the Derrys. Here they come. Clean hands, pets? Show them to Miss Alliston. I'm cutting bread and butter."

Ten spotless hands were held out for Helen's inspection. She felt inclined to bestow a kiss on each pink little palm, but contented herself with Peggy's, as being particularly delectable.

"Ooh! it tickles," Peggy chuckled; "do it again!"

The next day Helen went through elaborate calculations, and decided irrevocably that she must do something at once. Hope always flourished in the land of the Derrys; rosy visions of nice little girls and boys longing for her to give them music lessons rose before her. With the money she earned from them she would stay at the "Red Cottage," and would start on the novel she had in her head. The accounts were forgotten — she was off in the depths of the novel.

After luncheon she sought Pauline. Pauline was curled up in an arm-chair. "There are two frocks, five stockings, a pinny, a pair of gloves, a petticoat, and a pair of pyjamas waiting to be mended in my mending-basket, or somewhere," she observed. "Hesky wants me to go through a list of pots and pans that we need. I ought to write to Mrs. Lister. I've to nail up the shelf in Bubbles' room —" she paused.

"Oh, don't! You make me feel so horribly inferior."

"But I'm not going to do any of them," Pauline said naively.

"Well, give me some advice, then; will you?"

"I'll give you anything that does n't necessitate my leaving this chair."

"I want to earn some money."

"Oh, money!" She wrinkled her brow. "I loathe the very name of money."

"I could put up with a good deal of his company any-

way," Helen said with a sigh. "I've never seen half, or quarter enough of him yet."

"You certainly won't meet him here."

"I'm going to meet a little, horrid, business bit of him in that new little Terrace down the road."

Pauline opened her dark eyes.

"How? Why?"

"I want to teach some nice little girls and boys the piano."

"Oh, they would n't be nice little girls and boys in that Terrace."

"Frizzled heads and respectability?"

Pauline nodded.

"Don't want to earn money," she said; "you'd hate it."

"I must live, and one can't live, unfortunately, without it."

"Oh, well, try the Terrace then; but I feel convinced they all go to the high school."

She proved to be quite right: they did all go to the high school. Moreover, the possession of certificates was brought very plainly home as a *sine qua non* to Helen. Raised hands, raised eyebrows. "Oh, Florrie could not take lessons from an uncertificated teacher!" All told her the uselessness of thinking of making money in that direction.

She went back to the "Red Cottage," and rejoiced in its charming shabbiness and good-will.

"Oh," she said that evening at dinner, "what should I have done if you had proved respectable?"

Jem roared.

"I call that a nasty hit. Paul, are n't you hurt?"

"I'm thinking what *we* should have done if *you* had proved respectable," Pauline responded.

"Paid you back in your own coin, Miss Alliston," Jem said. "Do have some of that jelly; you don't know how long it will be before you'll see another jelly here."

"It's a 'Biographical Sketches of the Elizabethan Age' jelly," Pauline declaimed; "the first instalment."

"Oh, I'll have some then, and eat it in all reverence."

"I'm going round to Graham's this evening," Jem observed. "Will you come, Miss Alliston, and you, Pauline?"

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Helen laughed. "I don't know Mrs. Graham."

"Oh, she'd be delighted. She longs to know you."

"I think I'll write to-night, thanks."

"You'll come, Paul?"

Pauline nodded.

"And, Jem, don't forget that book — whatever it was — that Sydney wanted to see."

Helen, alone in the shabby old den, stood and hesitated; she looked down on her portfolio and pondered.

"Duty says that short story; inclination says the novel!" She sighed. "Oh, to be rich enough to indulge my moods; a writer should be able to indulge her moods!"

The door-handle rattled; she knew it was rattled by Stentor's nose. She went across and opened the door; he walked in, wagging his tail graciously.

Helen sat down. "Stentor, come and help me!"

He came and rested his head on her knee.

"Stentor, I wonder if you know what a beauty you are? I wonder how any one can say dogs have no soul. Why, Stentor, your eyes are all soul as you look up at me like that. But, you know, if I were to cast my eyes about like that I should be called horribly affected." She stroked his ears, pulling them gently out. "Stentor, shall I do my duty or indulge my inclination? After all, I'm an author now; perhaps I should say inspiration instead of inclination, and if I had gone to see Mrs. Graham this evening, I could not have finished that short story; and if I write it while I'm just full of 'The Seats of the Lowly, I shall only do it badly.'" She laughed, and, bending, rubbed her cheek against his head. "Oh, Stentor, the novel it is! Go and lie down, old boy."

But in the ensuing days she gradually realised that she would have to banish herself from Derryland.

She tried everything first, but could find no little girls or boys who wanted her services; no old lady who was longing to be read to; no old gentleman who desired her to undertake his correspondence. There seemed to her to be only now a lady-companion, which meant exile from Derryland, and many other wearinesses of the flesh, which she pushed from her thoughts.

She went to Pauline and told her.

Pauline made it harder by her incredulity and failure to grasp the facts.

"Oh, you 'll make plenty by your writing by-and-by," she observed easily.

"But till the by-and-by comes?"

"Oh, don't bother about it. We never bother here, and we 've never any money."

"That's a figure of speech. You have some. In a few days I sha'n't have any, and mine is n't a figure of speech, it's a literal fact."

"But you can't be as poor as all that," Pauline reiterated. "There can't be any real necessity for you to go."

Helen said rather coldly, "I should not seek a post as companion for amusement."

Pauline immediately made her feel ashamed of herself.

"Oh, then, if it's really so, can't you stay here just as one of ourselves? You've plenty of clothes—till you make something by your writing?"

Helen was deeply grateful; and she had some difficulty in making Pauline understand that she could not do that.

Pauline was inclined to sulk.

"Very well, be stiff and horrid, if you like," she said, and turned a petulant shoulder on her.

Helen laughed. "Oh, mother of six!"

Pauline refused to smile.

"You see—" Helen began.

"Please don't talk. I want a nap."

But in the end she brought her round, as she brought most people.

She was oddly surprised and touched by the unanimity of the dismay the mere mention of her possible departure caused amongst the Derrys. But she was firm. She knew she must go. Also she must tell Lilian of her plans. She realised what that meant, but it had to be done.

She retired to the den one evening, determined to write to Lilian and propose herself as a visitor.

Pip burst into the room. "Oh, Miss Alliston, *have* you seen Johnson?"

"No one has come in here since I've been here," she answered.

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Pip stared at her; then, with a squeal of laughter, turned and ran from the room.

Jem looked in. "I wonder I don't drown all those Derrys in a bucket!"

"For what special reason?"

"Why, they've lost my dear old coat — the one I wear when the kindly shades of night hide me from the rude eyes of passers-by. They use it for their theatricals —"

"Bun got it, Dad;" and in trotted Bunny, trailing a great brown overcoat behind him.

Jem seized hold of it, and, helped by various Derrys, hurried into it. He picked up three great fat books, and a thin one, and rammed them into his pockets.

"I'm off to John Keele's, Miss Alliston. Good-bye."

John Keele was the editor of *Notes on Science*.

"Oh, Bubbles, Miss Alliston thinks Johnson is a *some one*!" squeaked Pip.

Bubbles stood on his head, and from that uncomfortable position quoted dramatically:

"I mark the brown great-coat of cloth he wore,  
That two huge Patagonian pockets bore,  
Which Patagonians (wondrous to unfold!)  
Would fairly both his Dictionaries hold."

Helen, laughing, turned back to her letter.

The answer came promptly. She was to come at once, and stay a long, long time.

She packed, helped by the Derrys, and departed.

In the lift ascending to Lilian's charming flat, she braced herself. She had not hinted at her plans in her letter.

Lilian greeted her rapturously.

"I was coming in the brougham to meet you, Helen, but I have had a little neuralgia lately, and Augustus said I had better not. Oh, I have such heaps to tell you! I really did mean to drive out to that funny place where you are staying, but there never seems time for anything, and we are going down to Brackenhurst next week —"

Helen gently touched her soft, pink cheek.

"And you are happy?" she said.

The tears came into Lilian's blue eyes.

"Oh, Helen, I don't deserve to be so happy! Oh, if



only I could see you as happy as I am. Augustus is so good to me — oh, he is wonderful. And if only you would come and live with us, you would meet men, and you might care for one, and be like Augustus and me — ”

At that moment Augustus entered the room.

“ Ah, Helen, we began to think you had forgotten our existence. And how have you been prospering? ”

Helen, wishing earnestly that she could like the man who made Lilian so happy, tried to be nice to him. He responded readily. He grew so affectionate and relationy that she drew back, and, in the end, announced her determination of seeking some post as companion, abruptly, and at a bad moment.

After that it was all a jar of nerves for her. She fought it out, step by step. She met Augustus' objections flipantly; but Lilian's plaintive reproaches were harder to parry.

“ You *know* how glad we should be to have you here, Helen! ” she reiterated over and over again.

“ I cannot bear to think of my wife's sister being obliged to earn her bread,” Augustus said.

“ Don't you think,” she suggested, “ the remedy lies with yourself? Merely — don't think of the disagreeable sister.”

He flushed. “ We are not always masters of our thoughts.”

“ Augustus is so kind-hearted,” Lilian interposed.

“ You are both kind — it's good of you to want me — but I must have my freedom — my self-respect. Don't think me horrid, Lilian,” she added pleadingly. “ Do try to understand, dear.”

But Lilian was incapable of understanding.

She stayed at the flat for ten days. On the fifth day Lilian said wistfully:

“ Augustus loves to talk to you.”

And Helen answered gaily, “ And loves to look at some one else! ”

Lilian blushed and smiled. “ I — I thought he looked at you, Helen.”

She laughed. “ Oh, you little humbug! You know he looks at you.”

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Lilian's face cleared. She laughed happily — like a child.

"I — wish you liked that Mr. Wentworth," she said inconsequently.

"I do like him."

"Oh, you know what I mean! I only asked him to dinner for that —"

"Lil, don't be so brazen! Poor young man, if only he had known, would he have eaten such a good dinner, I wonder?"

"You seem so fond of those children — what is it you call them? — oh, yes, Derrys." Lilian pursued her own line of thought. "Perhaps you would like a widower with two or three little children —"

Helen sank into a lounge chair and leant back against the pink cushions, laughing. "What have I done to deserve such a fate, Lil?"

Augustus came in. He looked, with artistic pleasure at her dark head outlined against the pink cushions.

"My dear Helen, you should always have a pink background," he said.

Her hand made an involuntary movement towards the cushions. She sat forward, and they slipped down.

The day she left town Lilian's thoughts were somewhat absorbed in worry over a sore throat with which Augustus was afflicted.

It was a dull day with a biting east wind; flecks of sleet fell at intervals. The mud was thick and slippery beneath one's feet. Helen, in a comfortless third-class compartment on the Great Northern, sat and shivered in a deadly loneliness. She looked, with whimsical wretchedness, towards the muddiness of her left boot, as the culminating point. She hated to have muddy boots; but she felt no indignation at the perambulator wheel that had worked the mischief. She was at a dull level; her only feeling was a cold loneliness. She saw always before her Lilian's furtive glances at the station-clock; her backward movement towards the station steps even as she waved her handkerchief to Helen in her departing train. And there was no one else. She wondered what it must feel like to

have others — plenty of others. Her mind went forth with a dull shrinking to the insertion of the advertisement already written. She recognised the same loneliness again; the same going forth amongst strangers alone, disapproved by Lilian.

She looked out at the falling sleet and smiled at herself. "Oh, doldrums;" but the smile did not chase them away.

She arrived at her station, cold and cramped. As the train slowed down she had a pessimistical thought. "The Derrys — Pauline — will all have forgotten me. I'm only outside, after all."

The train stopped. She rose and tried to turn the handle with her stiff fingers.

A shrill shout rent the air. "Here she is, the blessed Queen!" and Bubbles' eager face and wild hair bobbed outside the window pane, while Bubbles' hands wrenched the door open; and in a swarm of welcoming Derrys she stepped on to the platform. She stood a moment silent; she made a little impulsive gesture with her hands as if she would have included them all in an embrace. "Oh, my Derrys!" she said in a queer voice. She was possessed by them, and carried from the station; in the Babel of voices she made out presently that they were anxious to know if she were going to "cab it or walk?"

She glanced at her dress-case, sturdily carried by Bubbles, at her dressing-bag trailed along by Bunny.

She said diffidently, "I suppose I could have my things sent on?"

Bubbles' dignity rebuked her.

"I don't see the percellency," he said coldly.

Bunny merely ejaculated quietly:

"Men — cally — allyways —" and toiled on, dragging the dressing-bag with him.

She had a moment of acute indecision. Was she entitled to the extravagance of a cab? She decided, recklessly, to be extravagant rather than face Bubbles' and Bunny's indignation. Glancing at Bunny's small figure, laboriously dragging and bumping her dressing-case, she said quickly:

"I would sooner drive."

There were two cabs waiting. She recognised the driver who had driven her to the "Red Cottage" on her arrival. In

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mercy to his horse, whose legs gave him the appearance of a chronic wish to kneel, she accosted the other cabman.

The man's phlegmatic eye came round slowly to her face. It did not alter. It fell suddenly upon the Derrys, grouped behind her, and it awoke; it even gleamed with mirth.

"Hulloa, Mr. Jenkins," Bubbles accosted him. "Has Peter nearly finished?"

"Quite, sir."

Amidst a swarm of Derrys, caressing his horse, the cabman took off the nose-bag.

"Any luggage, Miss?"

"This," said Bubbles; "it had better go on the box, Mr. Jenkins."

"Yes, sir."

"You know, Mr. Jenkins, we don't weigh much to-day," cut in Pip's business-like voice; "we had boiled mutton for dinner, and the sauce was burnt, so we didn't eat much; so you're not to charge a lot for us —"

"All right, Miss; in you get."

Helen, squeezed in between Dulcie and Peggy, with Bunny and Pip and Bubbles opposite her, felt warm for the first time since she had started on her journey.

She was told all the news, — from the fact that Stentor had had a kitten, to the bruise on Bubbles' knee, got while climbing over a forbidden wall.

Dulcie told Helen confidentially, "I *did* want to make the kitten look pretty for you, and I could n't find any ribbon, and so I took a blue garter of mother's — oh, *such* a pretty one — and wound it round his *teeny* little neck —"

"Stentor carries him about in his mouth," said Peggy; "and," in a beaming burst, "we've got muffins and clumpets for tea!"

At the hall door Pauline waited; a stream of light shone down the front path. Helen, with a warmth about her, recalled vividly the story beloved of her childhood; with just such a stream of light had Cynthia been welcomed after one of her brief absences from the little red-housed home.

Dulcie murmured, as she clung to her arm, "I do like an open door in the dark."

Helen slipped her arm round her shoulders. "So do I, Dulcie domum," she said, and laughed.

"Oh," she said to Pauline, "I've entered your house with a pun upon my lips — and a bad pun, too. One thing, it could hardly be called a jest. Mary McGregor always told us that if one entered a house with a jest upon one's lips, it turned to dust and ashes in one's mouth before the month was out."

"Helen," Pauline said, "Helen — Helen." She gave a little laugh of satisfaction. "I'm not going to call you Miss Alliston any more, Helen. Come upstairs, and take your things off. Derrys, run and wash hands and faces!"

"I can't move," Helen said; "I'm sorry, but I could n't disturb *that*."

"That" was Stentor, in an affected attitude, with head pressed against her knee, eyes upturned to her face.

Pip's dark face kindled. "Oh, *will* you come just like that — with Stentor like that — when I'm grown up, so that I can paint you?"

Pauline, up in Helen's room, sat on the bed and watched her. She asked after Lilian, then fell silent.

Presently Helen, combing back the heavy waves of hair from her brow, said, "You don't look well; you look as if you've been worrying."

Pauline sighed, and her vivid little face clouded. "Things have been going badly; it has been bread-and-scrape days."

Helen slipped on the quaint little opal ring that had belonged to her mother.

"Is it past now?" she asked.

Pauline did not answer; she was wondering in a puzzled way how she expressed so much without saying anything. There had been sympathy in the very way she had slipped on the ring.

Helen turned and looked down gravely at her. "It is n't," she said.

"No, not quite. You'll have cold boiled mutton for lunch to-morrow."

She smiled. "Oh, if it were only that!"

"There's always bread. The Derrys have been brought up largely on bread."

"Bread," said Helen, "is a useful article of food, composed of flour kneaded into dough. It is commonly spoken

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of as 'The Staff of Life,' *vide* 'Questions and Answers on Every Day Matters,' she laughed. "It would warm Miss Flickers' heart to hear how well I remember her lessons. Pauline, why have you had my fire lit?"

"You need n't scold me. I had to. A fire's such a welcome."

Helen stood looking down into its deep, red glow.

"You and the Derrys would have done," she said.

"Oh," there was a note of irritation in Pauline's voice, "we're not reduced to counting our fire-wood pieces yet!"

Helen said quietly, still looking into the fire, "I like wood so much better than coal. What a glow to welcome one!"

Pauline stared at her sombrely.

"Oh, I know I'm cross," she said naively. "I do get like that — sort of prickly — when things go very wrong. Sometimes I pack all the Derrys out of the room, lock the door, and just sit. Then I quiet down, and get lonely, and call the Derrys back, and we hug each other."

Helen smiled.

"Overwrought nerves."

"U—um — or overwrought temper — it comes to much the same thing, I fancy. Only it does make me wild. Jem has been working so hard at those plans — and then it all fell through. Another man was chosen for the job, because he'd a name — that's all! Jem was passed over. Oh, well," slipping from the bed, "come down to tea now."

The shabby old room downstairs wore quite a festive air. A large Dutch jar stood in the centre of the table, overflowing with ivy leaves, — yellow greens, blue greens, bronze, brown, red. Helen exclaimed at their beauty.

"My godmother sent them from Scotland," Dulcie explained proudly; "she picked them herself, right near the sea."

The fire roared up the chimney; a fresh-washed, fresh-brushed contingent of Derrys awaited their coming. In the background, looking round the kitchen door, loomed Hesky's comfortable figure.

Helen greeted her. Hesky's response was practical. "Shall I bring the hot things in now, Miss, or give you

a few minutes more to fuss about? They 'll spoil if they ain't eaten quick and hot."

"Oh, bring them now, Hesky; they smell so good! I can fuss over the Derrys while I eat."

She picked up a rosy Cherub, and held him high in the air.

"Cherub, how many kisses have you saved up for me?"

He gurgled and kicked out his fat legs.

"Kiss," he chuckled, and saluted her heartily, and with a good deal of noise.

Hesky brought in the hot things.

"You 'll please to sit down, and begin on them at once, Miss!" she said, and took her departure.

Pip lifted the covers. "Oh, Mummy, meal fingers!" she exclaimed.

Pauline gave Helen a solemn look.

"My dear, I knew you were charming, but to win Hesky's heart to the extent of meal fingers! They are her one and special dainty. No one can make meal fingers but Hesky. Hesky invented and composed them. Hesky holds the copyright. Hesky produces them only on very rare and special occasions."

"She won't make them for Angela," put in Pip; "she says his pallet is n't observing enough."

"She has never forgiven him for not discerning the difference between her home-made buns and some bought ones," Pauline said.

"He's in the kitchen now," observed Bubbles; "he came to ask her if she's thinkin' of comin' home this week, because he wants to send his Sunday trousers to be mended."

"It's evidently to be a festive occasion when she returns," Helen said. "Poor old man! Derrys, you've a lot to answer for."

"Oh," observed Pip, "he does n't care. 'So long as he can sit and smoke his pipe one side of the fire, he does n't care a brass farthing who's on the other side.'"

She was evidently quoting Hesky.

Helen looked round the table at the yellow and flaxen and brown heads, and laughed. "Derrys," she said, "when I've made my fortune I shall buy you all!"

"Rubies and gold you would need," quoth Bubbles.

"And much fine linen," added Pip.

"And precious oil," put in Dulcie.

"All these, and more, will I have when my ship comes in, O most conceited Derrys! Its very sails are of such a fine linen as was woven only in the time of Alexander the Great. It was woven from the webs the fairies spun at night to catch the dewdrops. Its hold is full of gold and precious stones. Its deck is studded with them. It overflows with jewels and gold and silver, so that it leaves a shining track of them,—blue, gold, pink, green, red, amber, silver,—all shimmering and glinting in its wake. And it carries great old Oriental jars of wonderful hue and design, full of oil made from the rare Hyperbolicalaceous plant, which only grows on the top,—on the very top, all amongst the blues of the sky, and the golds and pinks of the sun, and the very freshest of the breezes,—of the beautiful hills of Fantasia." She laughed out. "Oh, Bubbles, that was almost worthy of you!"

"Go on," Bubbles said earnestly.

She shook her head.

"Bubbles, do you forget I am an Author now? Such a capital A, Bubbles,—a real Brobdingnagian A! And my every word is precious copy,—too precious to be wasted on wild-haired Derrys."

Living in the "Red Cottage" had schooled her; she made no sign when Stentor approached her with a tiny, furry leg dangling from his mouth. She looked bravely upon the kitten he deposited in her lap. True to Derryland, it was whole and sound. She stifled the sigh of relief that rose to her lips, and admired the kitten's collar.

After tea she went into the kitchen after Bunny. She found him pommelling a meek old long-nosed man, who rose awkwardly at her approach. Hesky, hands on comfortable hips, looked on, laughing.

"He wants the pipe, Miss," she explained.

William Angel took a short clay pipe from his pocket, and eyed it fondly.

"But it ain't good for little boys," he said.

Bunny frowned. "Big boy. Fight you?" he queried ferociously.



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"It ain't what you'd call particular good for big boys either, so far as I can see," observed Hesky, dryly.

"But it's very nice, isn't it, William?" Helen said, smiling.

His pale eye lit. "It is that, Miss."

He shuffled off towards the door.

"Mind, now, William, you've promised to tell Sarah you're to start your new vests to-morrow," said Hesky.

He paused.

"Washing day ain't till Monday," he murmured.

"I don't care. Washing day or no washing day, you've got to start those vests to-morrow. Why, the one you've got on's wore so thin, it ain't decent —"

Helen had left the kitchen, and she heard no more.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HELEN ADVERTISES FOR A PLACE

HELEN had taken the plunge: she had advertised in the *Morning Post* for a place as companion. Writing out the advertisement had, she said, been a salutary lesson to her, — a wholesome betrayal of her lack of qualifications of any sort.

"I can play the piano — a little. Oh, one and only attribute for the post of companion!"

"Don't be foolish," Pauline said; "you'll make a perfectly charming — an ideal companion, provided," with a shrewd smile, "the old lady's the right sort."

Helen looked interested.

"How?"

"She should have a lame leg, or a sorrow — to bring out your qualities properly. But I meant you've hardly the humble and meek spirit one associates with companions, have you?"

"I might cultivate it."

Pauline's small nose curled derisively.

"Don't try — you'd never do it."

"I may get a dear old lady, with white curls —"

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"You *may*!"

Helen looked into the fire gravely.

"Why don't you marry, and be done with it?" Pauline said suddenly.

"Where is the would-be Benedick?"

"Oh, there are hundreds, if you liked."

She was amused.

"I don't see even one."

"Jem's friend, Sydney Graham, would be one if you liked."

She frowned.

"Don't come down to particulars, Pauline."

"Don't you mean to marry?"

She picked up Stentor's kitten, and stroked it thoughtfully.

"I don't think I shall," she said.

"It will be a pity if you don't."

"For me?"

"Yes; but I meant for the man."

"You are kind."

"Tell me why you don't think you'll marry."

"Because — well, I've no leaning to it in the abstract. I mean I could n't, marry as I see girls —"

"Not caring much?"

"Yes. Careless — liking the man — happy-go-lucky."

Pauline reflected.

"It's right enough for them. If they're that sort, it suits them well enough. But it wouldn't do for you. But if you cared enough?"

Helen was silent, stroking the kitten gently down its back. Its loud purr filled the pause.

Pauline urged her question.

Helen laughed lightly. "Oh, who can tell to what follies I might stoop in that case?"

"But do you think you'll ever care enough?"

"I don't feel any preliminary stirrings that way, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, you're vexing! Hatefull!"

Her face sobered.

"Don't be cross. I never feel any sentimental inclination towards discussing things like that. Where is the

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good? How can I tell? Only there is this, —" she paused and flushed a little; the words dragged unwillingly, — "I do feel that if ever I could care — much, it would be for — for a man who would n't care for me," she laughed. "There, there's modesty for you!"

"You mean he'd have to be so fine? And you're not fine enough?"

"Something like that. Don't think I mean I'd pine away of unrequited love!"

"I see you doing it!" Pauline's tone was scornful.

"Well, I should n't."

"But you're quite wrong. That's just the kind of man who would care for you."

She shook her head.

"Do you suppose I shall get any answers to my advertisement?" she said.

Pauline's tone was uninterested as she answered, "I don't know." It grew interested again as she added, "There's Paul Herbert too."

Helen laughed out. "Oh, I could n't marry a brown-bearded young man!"

"That's because he's an artist; and he would shave it off."

"If he shaved it off till there was n't a hair left he would still remain a brown-bearded young man."

Pauline considered, smiling unwillingly.

"He's most eligible anyway."

"Oh, most!"

"You don't mind laughing at him?"

"Not an atom," cheerfully.

"You do at Sydney Graham?"

"Yes."

Pauline privately was glad. She considered it was a step in the right direction. She would rather it were Sydney.

"He's coming to dinner to-night."

"Who?"

"Sydney."

Helen stroked the kitten, and wished he were n't.

"His is a romantic story," Pauline pursued. "He's the only son of a widow — such a poor widow too. His father

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died when he was sixteen, and affairs went wrong somehow. Poor Sydney was mad to be an artist, and was training for it. He had to give it all up, and get anything he could to make money. He's had an awful struggle, but he's getting known as a landscape painter now. You see, he had it in him. He used to paint at odd times. He got lessons once from a sort of cranky genius who drank, in return for fetching him home safely from a public-house at night. He's dead now — he left all his painting things to Sydney — ”

“ Mother,” Pip came in like a whirlwind, “ Bubbles and Bunny are on the roof, and the trap-door's shut, and we can't get it open, and it's raining — ”

Helen was angry with herself because she felt a touch of constraint as she greeted Sydney Graham that evening. It made her manner a little more coldly gracious than usual; lent a deepened gravity to her eyes.

Pauline's words had given her a suspicion that worried her. She would hate to hurt him; she felt oddly protective towards him, because he was quiet and shy, and slim and young-looking for his years, in spite of his hard life. There was no need for pity towards him, she told herself; he had won. To be a man, and to strive and win, must be glorious. But, angry with herself, she did pity him. And Pauline's words had brought the deeply-hidden reason to light.

He came often to the “ Red Cottage ” in those days. He did not wait to be invited. No one ever waited to be invited to the cottage. Pauline dispensed a dinner of cold beef, followed by a jam tart, as serenely as a dinner of soup, fish, poultry, sweets, dessert. She merely warned a visitor — “ Times are bad.”

Helen admired the way she did it. She also admired the careless way she or Jem warned a visitor of the broken chairs. And it amused her.

There came an evening — an evening of a day when she had been counting her scanty store, and worrying over the no-answers she had received to her two advertisements — when she looked pale and tired, and Sydney Graham was there. Paul Herbert was there too, amiable, ready to do anything for any one, most estimable.

At the end of the evening, under cover of one of Jem's songs, Sydney approached her.

"I'm going," he said.

"You are early, are you not?"

"Yes —"

"Work?"

He hesitated. "You want to get rid of us," he said, smiling.

"I? Oh, what a horribly inhospitable thought to be born in the 'Red Cottage.'"

"I put it badly. I mean we ought to go —"

Paul Herbert came up smiling.

"Miss Alliston, won't you play to us?"

Very soon they went. As Sydney shook hands, a sentence seemed to break from him against his will.

"To-morrow," he said; "I — shall come to-morrow —"

Helen was frightened. As the next evening drew near, she grew more frightened. She was ashamed of herself, but she could not help it. When she went up to dress for dinner, a sudden impulse came to her. She undressed and went to bed. She lay and laughed at it all, at herself.

Pauline came in. "My dear! are you ill?"

"I feel—oh, there was nothing for it but bed, Pauline!"

The touch of desperation seemed natural enough to Pauline. Truly it was a blessed thing in the "Red Cottage" that all things were looked upon as natural enough.

"I know," she said; "it's nerves. I'll send up some dinner on a tray. Can you hook that cuff? I can't."

Helen felt that almost she could have wept into her pillow for love of Pauline at that moment.

Later on Pauline said to Jem, "Do you think she knew Sydney was coming?"

"How could she, unless she has second sight? He just dropped in."

"He might have told her he was coming."

"Pshaw! He would n't make up his mind like that, my dear."

"Why did he just shut up when I said Helen did n't mean to come down?"

"Disappointment."

"It was more than that."

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"Very well."

"She'll never have him, Jem."

"I've hopes."

"Well, you may as well give them up, then."

He considered.

"She seems to like him."

"Oh, she likes him. That's why she went to bed."

"Liking turns to love."

"It does n't."

"My dear —"

"Liking deepens enough to marry on, sometimes — that's all. And Helen would n't marry like that."

"Poor old Syd!" he sighed; "it's rough on him, Paul." She nodded.

"And on Helen, too."

"I don't see why."

"All right."

He laughed. "Paul, I've wanted a kiss all the evening!"

Helen rose the next morning with an unaccustomed little feeling of shame worrying her. In broad daylight, she felt that she had been ridiculous.

Later that day she was out, oddly enough, alone. She generally had a Derry or two with her. Of course she met Sydney Graham. She had known she would. She saw him before he saw her; for a moment she felt a cowardly longing to turn and flee. Then she walked straight on, and met him.

"Did you stay upstairs last night because of me?" he said; his tone was mechanical through much saying of the words over to himself.

"Yes," she said.

He grew a little paler.

"You need not have done that," he said gently; "I would n't have worried you —"

She put out her hand. "It was n't that — I — hate to —" her voice died away.

He took her hand and smiled; his young-looking face seemed to have aged since last she had seen him.

"Don't you worry," he said; "I — I'll get over it."

"Oh," her eyes looked at him through heavy tears, "I wish — I'm so hard and cold — that's it —"

He smiled oddly. "No, it's not that. You're not that." A spasm crossed his face a moment. "I should have known. I think I have known — all along — you're not for me — you're heaps too good —"

There was a pause.

"I do like you —" She broke down, realising the uselessness of saying anything. "Oh, I'm so sorry —" she murmured distressfully.

"Don't you be sorry," he said with a show of cheerfulness; "a man's got to put up with things. I'll get through all right —"

She watched him go, — the slim, youthful-looking figure, the fair head not quite so upright as usual. Her miserable sorrow gave place to a hot anger — against herself; she hated herself just then. Who was she to make a man like that look as he had? She felt a swift inclination to call him back — to say something, — tell him to wait — But she stood still. She knew — she never had the slightest doubt in spite of her deep liking for him — that she could never marry him.

She was in the Broadway. She saw, mistily, a ragged figure that reminded her of Bubbles running along and turning somersaults on the pavement beside the tram cars. She felt a far-away sorrow that an urchin with Bubbles' hair should have to do that. But probably the urchin enjoyed it anyway.

She turned and went back to the "Red Cottage" without doing her shopping. Pauline, Cherub-laden, met her in the hall; she looked at her empty hands. "Where are the flowers and the note-paper?" she asked.

Helen looked down vaguely.

"The what? Oh, I forgot!"

Pauline's voice sharpened a little.

The Derrys had been troublesome that morning, and Pip had burnt a hole in the morning-room carpet, and another in her frock — "Seeing if we could hold red-hot cinders, Mother."

"You forgot!" she exclaimed; "but you went out for them!"

"I'll go back," Helen said.

"Oh, no!" Pauline's eyes, released from the Cherub's

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encircling arms, had gone to her face. "Did you meet—?" She broke off and bit her lip.

"Yes," Helen said. She turned back. "I'd sooner go."

Pauline let her go. She went into the morning-room and dumped the Cherub down on the sofa. "You stifle me, Cherub! Don't begin to howl!"

Pip was writing a copy over at the table; the room smelt strongly of burnt carpet and frock. Pip's eyes peered through elf-locks at Pauline, and Pip went on writing, assiduously.

"Where are the others?" Pauline said.

"I—I think they're exercising the rabbits, Mother."

"You'll all grow up awful ignoramuses! I told you all to do some lessons. I think I'm about sick of you all!"

Pip looked mournful.

"I think they're coming back," she said.

"How good of them!" Pauline's tone was intensely irritated. "Of course, the rabbits come before me! Don't touch me, Pip! Go back!"

Pip went back to her copy.

"I'm going up to my room," Pauline said, and departed. Pip heard the key turn in the lock. She went on with her copy. Presently Hesky's broad face peered round the door.

"Do you know where mistress is, Miss Philippa?"

"In her room," Pip said shortly.

Hesky turned to go.

"The door's locked," Pip said.

Hesky paused. "There's the pastry she was making getting spoilt."

"It'll have to be spoilt. You're interrupting me, Hesky."

Hesky nodded understandingly and went back to the kitchen.

After a while Dulcie and Peggy and Bunny came back.

"Where's mother?"

"In her room, and the door's locked."

The Derrys quieted down, and got out their lesson-books decorously.

Helen, returning, met Pauline emerging from her room. Pauline said, "I know. I've been in a blazing temper. I was horrid to Pip and the Cherub."



"You should have been horrid to me."

"Oh, you!"

She went towards the stairs.

"I only feel sorry now."

Helen did not say what she felt.

"I'm going to hug those Derrys."

Helen watched her small figure down the stairs, with sombre eyes.

Bubbles did not appear at dinner, and his absence almost made Pauline uneasy.

The Derrys' superlatively innocent faces proclaimed that they knew his whereabouts.

Helen asked Pauline later why she did not find out where he was from them.

"Oh, I never make the Derrys tell about each other, unless, of course, I'm fairly driven to it. It's one of Jem's axioms that I've absorbed. 'Keep them *straight*,' he says; and he does n't call that straight."

Helen looked thoughtful.

"It's fine," she said.

"The Doctor's children — at the corner of the Terrace, you know — are little sneaks. You constantly hear — 'Oh, Mother, Arthur's got your hair-brush!' 'Oh, Mother, Walter's pinching me!' and so on. The Derrys scorn them."

She darned a hole in a Bunny sock in silence. There was still a touch of unusual despondency about her.

"But the Doctor's children have a governess with a sheaf of certificates a mile long," she said. "I suppose the way the Derrys' education is carried on is very bad?"

"Well, you see, it has been holidays while I've been here — mostly —"

"Oh, yes. Only very occasional lessons — to keep them quiet, and that sort of thing. Pip went to a kindergarten for a term a few years ago. But we could not keep up to that level." She shrugged her shoulders, and laughed.

"Bubbles electrified me with a Latin quotation yesterday," Helen said.

"Jem teaches him and Pip Latin in the evenings a little. I do the rest."

"Well," Helen said thoughtfully, "I suppose I don't

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know much about children, but the Derrys strike me as being anything but backward."

Pauline laughed. "No, I don't think they're backward."

Bubbles turned up at tea-time.

He had a fine colour, and his eyes were sparkling.

"Oh, I've been out," he observed airily, in response to questionings.

"Oh, well," Pauline observed, "you know you're not to take French leave like that, Bubbles. And Stentor was n't with you."

Bubbles looked hurt.

"I'm not a baby, Mums."

"You're to tell me where you have been."

"In the Borough, and about."

"What on earth have you been doing there?"

"Need I say, Mums?"

"Yes, pet."

"I'm awful 'fraid I can't."

"Well, you've got to, Bubbles."

There was a long pause. Helen felt quite nervous.

Bubbles turned his face to her.

"It was nothin' bad," he said.

"Oh!" She looked appealingly at Pauline.

Suddenly Bunny spoke.

"Mans has busyness 'times,'" he observed earnestly to his mother.

"A man is n't afraid to own up," Pauline said.

An exclamation escaped Helen. She frowned. She felt that Pauline had made a false step.

Bubbles' face was scarlet.

"I'm not 'fraid," he said in a queer little cold way.

"Show you're not, then," Pauline responded.

Helen had a feeling that somehow he was showing it.

He did not answer.

Pip interceded, "Oh, *don't* worry him, mother!"

"I think he's worrying me, my dear."

"Mummy love," Dulcie implored, "he'll tell you another day!"

Bubbles sat silent.

After tea Pauline locked him into his bedroom.

"All those Derrys have horrible wills," she said to Helen; "they're iron."

"I'm all for Bubbles."

"Of course. So am I, bless him. But you don't think I ought to have given in?"

"Oh, no, you could n't."

"Jem and the dark will do the rest."

When they were at dinner, Bubbles appeared.

"Is it very wicked to keep a thing back, Dad?"

"Yes."

"But if I tell, you'll stop me — Miss Alliston, how much money would you want to be able to stay here?"

She smiled. "Oh, bags of gold, Bubbles."

He turned to the door. In spite of patched pyjamas, there was a dignity about him.

Jem reached out a long arm, and hauled him back.

"Now, Bubbles, I'm about tired of this. Let's have it."

Bubbles looked up steadily into his face.

"I won't, Dad."

Helen was searching after a misty idea. She gave an exclamation:

"You've been turning somersaults in the Borough!"

Bubbles' eyes hurt her in their reproach.

"So that's it," Jem said. "How did you know, Miss Alliston?"

"I saw him. It did n't strike me till just now that it really *was* Bubbles. I believe I know why he was doing it;" she rose, and took him on to her knee. "Oh, you dear Bubbles —"

"I'm not your dear Bubbles, if you don't mind," with chill politeness.

She looked across at Pauline.

Pauline laughed quietly, and took an orange on to her plate.

"Tell us why you did it, Bubbles," she said.

He seemed tired of the subject.

"It was to get 'nough money for Miss Alliston to stay. I think I'll go to bed now."

Helen was seized in a whirlwind of emotions. She felt crushed — mean — and was conscious of a deep gratitude to Bubbles.

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"Oh, Bubbles," she entreated, "I think it was fine of you! Don't let 's be enemies."

"Why did you tell?"

She sought to explain; but it was very difficult. Jem and Pauline listened amusedly to her eloquence. Of course Bubbles succumbed.

"He's pretty hard grit to hold out as long as that," Jem said to Pauline.

"I got ten pennies and five halfpennies," Bubbles said with a gleam of pride, "and I meant to go ev'ry day — that was why I could n't tell."

Helen went up to his room with him and tucked him into bed. She said softly, "Oh, Bubbles, I'll never forget this."

He peered up at her perplexedly. "But it's no good now."

"Oh, yes, it is — heaps, Bubbles."

"But it is n't —"

She wondered if he would understand.

"Why, Bubbles, it's like this — it's nice to feel I've such a good friend, and that's what you've made me feel."

He thought it over.

"I'll be your friend for ever and ever, world without end, Amen," he said earnestly.

"Bubbles, I can't help it. After that, I must kiss you — just once!"

She kissed him.

Bubbles peered across the room to where, a fat little white mound, Bunny lay asleep.

"Don't tell him," he whispered. He looked up at her gravely. "You kiss just like the soft part of a horse's nose, — the part just close by his mouth," he said.

The next day Helen advertised for the third time.

"You'll get something this time," Pip prophesied mournfully; "you always do the third time."

Dulcie dreamed awhile. "Very soon, quite near here, the daffiedownillies and the primroses come into the wood, and we would pick you heaps."

"I'll come and see you, dear."

She did have an answer that time — a one and only an-

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swer. She laughed over it, even while her heart sank. Pauline was merely scornful; she refused to even smile. Helen said lightly, "It's bad policy to let your sense of humour stray, Pauline," and insisted on reading the letter out loud.

"Mrs. Stanley-Browne, having seen H. A.'s advertisement in the *Morning Post* for situation as lady's companion, I should require more particulars before arranging to see you. Age, photograph, connections, as Mrs. Stanley-Browne could not have any one not of good family about her, being extremely sensitive on such matters. Reason for H. A. seeking situation as companion. Have you been in a situation before, in which case I should require reason for leaving, also thoroughly satisfactory references. If all these matters are settled satisfactorily by H. A.'s reply to above address I will give you a personal interview, where Mrs. Stanley-Browne would make all final arrangements."

"There, I defy you not to think that funny!" she said.

"It will kill you to live with a woman like that."

Helen frowned impatiently.

"One does n't die so easily. Anyhow, I am going to try it. Now, let me see. 'Age,'—that's easy. 'Photograph,'—I have n't such a thing. Pauline, do you hear that? It never struck me before. Surely I'm unique in this age of photography? Please, do you think my 'family' good enough? Once, a long while ago, there was a lord in it. Do you hear, Pauline? A *Lord*! Do you think I can drag him in? 'My reason for seeking post,'—well, that's simple enough. Does she think I would seek it for fun? 'No former situation,'—oh, I'm growing humble already! Was n't her 'Guide to Elegant Letter-writing' obviously inadequate?" She glanced in an irritated way at Pauline; Pauline was frowning her so horribly. In truth, Pauline looked distinctly sulky.

Helen eyed the small figure stabbing a needle in and out some everlasting darning, and smiled.

"I pity whoever has to wear those stockings."

Silence on Pauline's part.

"You have n't the most elementary sense of justice, Pauline, or you would n't visit my supposed delinquencies on Pip's or Dulcie's poor little toes."

"Well, to go to a vulgar old woman like that! We're

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shabby, but we're not vulgar, anyway. And times are quite grand just now."

"How vexing you are! Really, Pauline, you're quite indelicate. I won't discuss it any more, and I won't be grateful any more."

Pauline smiled unwillingly.

"Oh, go and kow-tow to the refined Mrs. Horatius-Smith!"

"I'll begin at once," she said, going towards Jim's writing-table.

A cry for mother resounded through the house. Pauline finished the hole she was darning, while the cry swelled, doubled, trebled, quadrupled; then she rose serenely and left the room.

Helen stabbed her blotting-paper rather fiercely, then eyed her nib remorsefully. She looked round the shabby, book-filled room, and the books danced uncertainly before her eyes.

"There won't be books — dear old shabby books — at Mrs. Stanley-Browne's palatial residence."

She pushed her hair back wearily. No one, not even Pauline, guessed what this going forth cost her. She wrote her letter at last, then went out, with four or five Derrys, and posted it.

She alternated, in the days of waiting, for an answer, between a longing that it should be favourable, and a longing that it should be unfavourable. When the answer came, she laughed.

"Mrs. Stanley-Browne having received Miss Helen Alliston's letter containing full particulars of your suitability for the situation as companion I should like to know if you are any relation to the Allistons of Thorpe of Thorpewold. If so please call at above address between eleven and twelve to-morrow A.M. when Mrs. Stanley-Browne will try to see you."

"The time it must have taken her! The dictionaries she must have needed! Oh, it's very funny!" she laughed.

She insisted on its being amusing so strenuously, that Pauline guessed at last her despair and kept silence.

Helen went the next morning to the "above address." It proved to be a tall, showy-looking house in Aldford Street. She walked past the gate once, head in air — a

hopeless coward. Then she braced herself scornfully, and turned and approached the house. She wondered how a would-be companion should attack the door-knocker and the bell. An enormous footman opened the door to her, and showed her into a large room, its furniture swathed in holland. She waited there a quarter of an hour; then, heralded by a rustle and a whiff of stephanotis scent, Mrs. Stanley-Browne entered the room.

"Ah — so busy when you're in town just for a few days at this time of year, what with dressmakers and milliners, and I don't know what all! Of course, one *can* only stay a day or two," letting herself carefully down into a chair; "it's so unsufferable, is it not? Not a *soul* to be met with — We're not *living* here just now, of course."

Helen listened politely. She wondered how Mrs. Stanley-Browne's dressmaker could be so cruel as to put a two-and-a-half-inch collar on a one-inch neck. That was the chief impression that lady made on her at first. Her face was so red, and she looked so terribly choked.

"You've come about the situation as lady-companion, Miss Alliston? Well, I'm sure I don't know — it was Sarra's idea — she 'appened to see your advertisement, and you being genteel —" she eyed her doubtfully. "I hope you wouldn't be *too* —" she paused. "You have n't the look about you that I thought a lady-companion would have, but p'raps that's because — your father was Mr. Alliston of Thorpe, was n't 'e?"

"Yes."

"It's a strange thing that 'is daughter should be obliged to go out as a companion," there was a note of awe in her husky voice. She creaked as she moved forward in her chair a little, and peered at Helen through a very badly managed lorgnette.

Helen waited coldly.

"What explanation have you got for such a thing?" pursued Mrs. Stanley-Browne, in a suspicious voice. There was a little pause. Helen fought earnestly against a longing to get up and go.

"I wish to earn some money," she said coldly.

Mrs. Stanley-Browne appeared flustered; she applied a lace handkerchief to her brow.

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"Oh, lor', yes," she startled her by ejaculating; "Marrian said I was n't to push that too far!" She eyed Helen with a certain approval. "You've got your pride, I see; that's only as it should be. I don't want a meek, common, or garden companion. I must 'ave some one a bit 'distanty,' you know; not but what you'll be expected to obey orders, of course. Are you engaged? No? Oh, well, I should n't like followers; but—there's Tom." She looked at Helen out of her shrewd little beady eyes. "I've got a son," she said; "he's going to marry a lady of title."

"Yes?"

Mrs. Browne unexpectedly chuckled; her shoulders shook as she gurgled with appreciation of Helen's calm. The matter was clinched there and then in her mind. Tom or no Tom, she must secure a companion who heard unmoved of the destiny decreed for her son.

Helen waited patiently; she had not the least idea what Mrs. Browne was laughing at. She was rather interested; she had not thought that collar would allow laughter.

"That is to say, he's not *engaged* yet," Mrs. Browne pursued; "but 'e won't look any lower than a lady of title, you understand."

Helen sat in her beautiful calm, and failed quite to see the point that was being coarsely urged at her.

"I see," she said gravely; "and you would want me—?" she suggested.

"Oh, to make yourself handy about the place, to—"

"Read to you?"

"Oh, well, I don't know that I care about being read to much. I should want you to—to—"

"Play? I can play—"

"Oh, as for that, what with Sarra and Marrian, I get plenty of piano-playing."

"Then—?"

"Oh, to do things, you know. Write letters and invitations, and—er—well, you see, we've led very secluded lives lately, on account of—of—private reasons—and in any little 'commy fo' matter—and that sort of thing that I did n't want to be bothered with—but there, Miss Alliston, you'd soon fall in with your duties; and if I



found you satisfactory — why, you'd 'ave a comfortable home."

Another rustle approached. A big, dark, young woman, high-coloured and large-nosed, entered the room, swishing at every movement.

"Oh, Mater, not done yet?" she drawled, her eyes on Helen; "Madame St. Claire will be waiting."

"I'm just done, love. I've only got to settle a few perticklers with her —"

"Well, hurry up! The horses are very fresh this morning." She was drawing on a very tight pale yellow glove; and all the time her beady eyes were studying Helen with insolent attention.

Presently Helen, walking off as Mrs. Stanley-Browne and her daughter entered their brougham, wondered heavily if she could accept the "situation."

"They're very funny — oh, yes, very; I could appreciate them better at a distance!"

The vulgarity of them appalled her; their pretentiousness sickened her. She wished she had n't an imagination; she pictured herself with fatal clearness amongst them.

"Companions are not meant to have imaginations."

She walked on into Hyde Park; she tried to lose herself in thoughts of the past; she wandered, trying to get thrilled, as she had been before, with the wonder of London.

"I have n't a thrill in me!" With comic despair she recognised the fact, and set to work rigorously to walk herself into a better frame of mind. She arrived at the "Red Cottage" after luncheon, tired and smiling.

"Oh, vulgar — yes; but we knew that, didn't we? And I'm to get £40 a year, all found. She said 'all found.' I don't know what it means."

"I've sent all the Derrys out with Stentor. Eat your lunch. What is she like?"

Helen considered. "Well, she is n't graceful. She's short and stout and done up very tightly — but she laughed once. I amused her — I don't know how. She is n't severe, anyway."

"But what is she *like*? Oh, *how* vexing you can be!"

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"I'm telling you. She flings her h's about rather recklessly, and she was dressed in mauve satin trimmed with jet."

"Oh, don't!"

"Well, she was."

"Did you see any one else?"

"A daughter came in."

Pauline leant across the table eagerly.

"Well?"

"She was a taller edition of her mother, only without the mauve silk and jet."

"Vulgar?"

"Yes."

"What did *she* wear?"

"Oh, my dear, a creation — I don't know — white and scarlet — with sables. I suppose the sable was real; there's no reason why it should n't be, but they are the kind of people who make everything look imitation."

"Oh, don't go!"

"Well, I'm going. I can always give a month's notice, you know."

"What will your sister say?"

A shadow darkened Helen's eyes.

"She won't like it, of course. Let's leave it now, Pauline."

## CHAPTER IX

### AT STANLEY HALL

HELEN stood in a mighty room brilliant with red upholstery, red and gold walls, and new bindings. In the newness, the glare, she struck a restful note that was oddly pathetic; she looked so beautifully out of place there.

A red, blue, and green parrot in a gilt cage eyed her with his head on one side, and shrieked aggressively. She looked towards him and laughed suddenly.

"You're typical! To have you in a *library*!"

"Teach your grandmother! Teach your grandmother!"

Teach your grandmother! Teach your grandmother!" screamed the parrot.

She eyed him balefully.

"*What* a hateful little wretch you are!"

"Teach your grandmother! Teach your grandmother!"

She went towards the bookcases that lined the walls, and ran her hand softly over the glaringly new books.

"Poor things!" She took out a stiff, blushing, uneasy copy of Marion Crawford's "*Marietta*." She had read it at the "Red Cottage." She sighed; it was not even cut. She put it back gently amongst the other Marion Crawfords. Every author in the library was represented by the "entire set" of his works, arranged in neat rows.

She went back to the table and the letter she was writing to Pauline:

"If you could see my surroundings! If you could hear them! My shabby pen tries to hide its head—every time I approach it to the gold ink-stand it blushes. And the parrot—he's part of my charge. I'm detailed off down here because he looked lonely, the dear! If, one of these days, you see my name in the papers—taken up for murder—don't be surprised. If it were n't for a finicky dislike to the nastiness of it, I'm convinced I should wring his gorgeous neck. Moreover, I'm not at all sure, once I had embarked on a murderous course, that the affair would n't be a double one. My mistress, determined to be up-to-date, has procured from somewhere (Hades, I should conjecture) a diabolical, fat, wheezy pug. I *believe* his name is Toby, but as he is always addressed as Titsie and Tits, and so on, I'm not sure. He snaps and barks at every one, and snores till he creates quite a draught. He is out at present, thank goodness, with my mistress and her two daughters, who have gone for a 'ride' in the carriage. You want descriptions. Before Stanley Hall my pen fails. Tell Mr. Derrington he was wrong. I have no flow of language after all; to describe Stanley Hall is beyond me. Outside, it is painted in black and white squares like a chessboard. Inside, gildings, satins, velvets, abound. They have had a glorious old oak-tree

that stood by the side of the avenue cut down to make room for a row of laurels. Now picture it all, Pauline, and let me off. Don't think they're unkind to me, because they're not, and they're very amusing. In moments of expansion Mrs. S. B. addresses me as 'my dear.' I believe there is a genuine kindness beneath her vulgarity. As for my duties — Pauline, I am nothing more nor less than a Cyclopædia on Etiquette!"

She dropped her pen, and rose again restlessly. She was anxious not to tell too much to Pauline; to keep, above all, that horror of loneliness out of her letter, that feeling of having no one, — no one to turn to, — of being so terribly alien amongst her surroundings. And yet, in her loneliness, so smothered, so chained.

She walked restlessly up and down the room, then came to a standstill by the parrot's cage.

"Oh, Polly, be quiet! Well, I've taught my grandmother, then. I have n't any more grandmothers to teach. And you might give me a little peace, Polly; it's a quarter to four, and at four they will come in." The bird stopped screeching and listened with his head on one side.

She went on in a soothing voice, "You're the hatefulest little beast I've ever come across. If you knew how I loathe you, you'd surely die of shame." He raised his head. "Oh, you're a sweet, Polly," she cried; "you're a wicked little demon."

He performed a long, drawn-out screech as she paused for breath, during which the door was opened.

"Oh, Polly, how sweet you are! There, pet, don't scream any more — let me scratch your hateful little head for you — though it is n't amongst my duties, I'm sure. Polly, love, do you know what I am? I'm not a companion at all! I'm just a Cyclopædia on Etiquette!"

The heavy velvet curtains before the door were pushed aside.

"And I," said a pleasant voice, "am the Classical Dictionary."

She turned swiftly, a smile leaping to her eyes; she was conscious in the next few moments of an odd sensation of

gladness, of rest. A little deep sigh of relief broke from her. She smiled a welcome to the man bowing before her. "I am Boyne Carruthers," he said, and he picked up an antimacassar and flung it over the screeching Polly.

"Oh!" she said, "you must n't do that."

"Well, it's done. What will they do to me?" he smiled. "I wish you'd tell me who you are?" he suggested.

"Oh, I'm —"

"The Cyclopædia on Etiquette," as she paused. "I know that. Is it against the rules for me to ask who compiled you?"

"Not at all; it shows a praiseworthy interest in a useful book."

He considered. "Yes, but you have n't told me yet."

"Helen Alliston."

"Thank you. I believe I've met a relation of yours in South Africa."

"My cousin — Harvey Alliston? He ought to come home and look after Thorpe."

"He's shooting big game, and enjoying himself, is n't he?"

"I believe so."

He glanced towards the letter on the table.

"I am interrupting you."

"Oh, no; and here they come. I hear them."

"I hear them, too," and he sighed.

The door-handle was turned noisily, and Sara came in.

"How now, Miss Prunes-and-prisms. Mrs. Forbes-Hamlyn was jolly glad to have us call, I can tell you. A little mean place she lives in — would go into our hall, conservatory and all — oh!" The loud voice paused a moment as she caught sight of Boyne Carruthers; she tossed her head. "I have n't the pleasah, Mr. — er" she smiled ingratiatingly.

"I am the new tutor," he said meekly.

The smile faded; she raised her head. "Oh, Tom's tutor!" she said in an indescribable tone.

Helen glanced quickly at the Classical Dictionary; huge amusement shone in his eyes.

"Yes, Tom's tutor," he said meekly, as before.

"What are you doing in here?" Sara demanded.

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"Well, your footman showed me in here. Ought I to have gone up to my room?" anxiously.

"Oh, I don't know—I don't know anything about tutors, only—" she glanced nastily at Helen.

Helen did not see the glance; she was looking at the Classical Dictionary, and she saw a sudden, subtle change come over his face.

"Then—since you don't know anything about it—" he suggested smoothly.

Sara flounced about, and attacked Helen.

"What have you been doing, Miss Alliston? There's that invitation of the mater's you were to write."

"I've written it."

"Oh! Well, what are you staying here now for? Mater's sure to want you; you know, she won't stand any goings—"

"Can I help you, Miss Alliston?" his voice, quite quiet, cut in against Sara's, and drowned its rasping accents. Helen was gathering up her note-paper and blotter. He moved to her side, and stooping, picked up a pencil she had dropped.

Sara, after a surprised pause, exclaimed, "Miss Alliston, you never covered Polly up like that!"

"I did," Boyne Carruthers said, as he moved towards the door; "does n't it quiet him splendidly?"

"Take it off at once! You're never to do such a thing again! I never heard of such cheek! Miss Alliston, you've left a sheet of your note-paper on our table."

Boyne picked it up. A bell rang loudly. Helen heard "Miss Alliston! Miss Alliston!" in its insistent peal. She took the paper from his hand. "Thanks."

"Mistress wants you, Miss!" the staid voice at the door hurried her reprovingly.

"You'll catch it!" Sara said with engaging jocularity.

As she passed through the curtains he held back for her, she heard Sara giggle, "Oh, Captain Carruthers, is it proper for me to stay here?"

She shivered as she crossed the hall.

In the blue and gold drawing-room Mrs. Stanley-Browne lay back uneasily in a lounge chair. In one hand she held a gold-topped vinaigrette, in the other a

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lace-edged handkerchief. On the floor beside her, the pug sat on a red satin cushion. As Helen opened the door he started barking; as she came forward he barked and barked, till his goggle eyes nearly fell out of his head, and the intermittent wheezes sounded as if he must choke very soon.

"Really, Miss Alliston, I can't have you neglecting your duties like this!" Mrs. Browne's voice rose above the barks. "Here am I—there then, pet, don't 'e like bad people to come into the room, then?—here am I come in tired from my ride, and no one even to take off my boots!"

"Do you mean you want me to ring for your maid?"

In a lull her voice came clear and cold to her hostess.

"I—oh, of course, you would n't take off my boots."

"No," Helen said.

A short, square girl sitting in the window laughed apologetically.

"You must have been asleep, Ma!" she said.

"I never shut an eye in the daytime, Marrian, and that you know perfectly well. Lit down, Titsie, then," to the pug, "what's the matter with 'im, poor ickle petsie?" She stretched out her hand to stroke his head, and he snapped at it angrily, redoubling his barking.

She turned once more to Helen.

"Don't you get thinking I don't know what's what, Miss Alliston! I was n't thinking like—that's how it was."

"Shall I ring for your maid?"

"No!" she snapped.

Helen sat down and picked up a book of photographs.

The girl in the window yawned.

"That black blouse is awfully 'chick,'" she observed, staring at Helen; "but you ought to have had a bit of colour about it."

"I know what's what better than some people." Mrs. Browne was still ruffled. "I *knew* it was more fashionable to be 'bonghominy' and careless-like nowadays than so stiff and conventionable! Not to call, just because *she* 'adn't! Very likely she didn't like to, we

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being in such a much better position! We caught her on 'er very door-step, just going in. Wasn't that lucky now? And she's promised to call some day, though she could n't fix a day, her time being so much taken up. I shall invite her to dinner."

Helen gazed at a photograph of the Stanley Hall Avenue, from beneath raised brows.

"Or lunch. Which would you advise now — dinner or lunch?"

"I think I should wait till she has returned your call."

"Oh, there you are again! Well, I'll see. There comes afternoon tea. I'll just go and get my boots off while it draws."

She rose, drawing a long, deep breath on finding herself upon her feet, and Toby started barking lustily again.

The girl in the window emitted another weary yawn.

"You seem tired," Helen said, feeling somehow irritated.

Marian leant her frizzed head against the window curtain.

"I never used to be tired," she said dully.

Pity swept over Helen. She looked at the short, homely figure decked so incongruously in silks and satins; at the roughened hands lying idle in a gorgeous lap.

"Perhaps you need a tonic of some sort," she suggested gently.

"Oh, I'm not one for taking medicines, except Dr. Walker's Round Pills. Have you ever tried them? They're splendid."

Helen said with polite interest, "No. What are they for?"

"Oh, rheumatism, headaches, influenza, varicose veins, indigestion — everything. We knew a Mrs. Jones; she'd been bad for six years, in bed half her time, could n't eat anything without having awful pains afterwards, and as often as not being dreadfully sick and bad. She had pains in her back and legs, and never left the house. She'd tried everything, but could n't get any relief. Then a friend recommended Dr. Walker's Round Pills. She actually refused to try them at first," — Marian's face lit with rare expression, — "she did, really! 'Oh,' she said, 'I'm sick of trying things.' But she tried them at last.



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She took a box of them, and there she was out shopping, and eating roast pork for dinner!"

Helen had read of these people; she had never thought she would meet a friend of one of them. She eyed Marian with a new respect.

"It was wonderful," she said.

A dull colour was flickering in Marian's cheeks.

"Of course, pork's rather vulgar—" she began uncomfortably.

"But think what a triumph to be able to eat it!"

"Yes, that's true." She lapsed back into dulness.

"D'you know where Sarra is?" she asked.

"I left her down in the library."

"With Tom?"

"No."

"She's never alone? Sarra hates to be alone."

"Captain Carruthers was there."

"Who? Oh, Tom's tutor. That accounts for it. Sarra's a rare one for the men. What's he like?"

"You will see him presently, I suppose."

"Well, but you may as well tell me now. Go on. I do take such an interest in military officers."

"I think the tea is drawn," Helen said.

Marian rose lazily. "It was Sarra who was so keen after a classical tutor for Tom, and of course it was a great chance to hear of a gentleman who was a captain and all, but I don't believe somehow it'll answer."

Mrs. Stanley-Browne rustled in with an elaborate grey and pink tea-jacket flung on over her blue silk gown.

"Miss Alliston, you might just go down to the lib'ry while Marian pours out, and choose me a book."

Helen rose.

"Mind you look to see that it ends happy. I can't help crying if it's miserable, and it does make me look so 'orrid, my dear!"

"Crying is only becoming to heroines in books," Helen laughed.

"That's it! Oh, and look at the beginning to make sure it's about genteel folk. I can't abide reading about the lower classes—"

"Captain Carruther's come, Ma," interposed Marian.

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"I know, love. William told me."

Helen went down to the library. She felt a pleasant sensation of expectancy as she neared the door, as if she were going to rejoin a friend.

She found the Classical Dictionary making a tour of the bookcases.

"Miss Alliston, I just opened a sacrilegiously new Shakespeare at the immortal words: 'What's in a name?' Even William could make mistakes; he was at fault there. It was my name got me my present situation."

"I should n't wonder."

"Boyne Carruthers — nice name, is n't it? And to think it has brought me the inestimable advantage of instilling classical knowledge into a Thomas Stanley-Browne's head!"

She laughed out with sudden gladness. His quiet blue eyes twinkled.

"Do you know," he said quickly, "it's such a relief to find you here."

She was quite sure she ought to be dignified. While she was considering it he spoke.

"No, don't," he said, "I really don't deserve it."

She turned to the bookcase.

"I'm to find a book that ends happily and begins genteelly," she said staidly.

"I'm sure all the novels here are genteel. How about the middle?"

"Dukes and Duchesses and the élite of society."

He turned gravely to a bookcase. Helen from the other end of the room, watched amusedly.

"I can't get it out," he observed after a struggle, "I believe they're dummies."

"Oh, those?" looking over her shoulder, "yes, they are."

He gazed speechlessly at the handsome bindings.

"Well, a person who would do that, would — Miss Alliston, think of something worse."

"Murder?"

"Not nearly so bad."

He wandered down the room.

"Standard works — most praiseworthy. Lord, how deadly respectable!"

Helen was fluttering the leaves of one after the other of Mrs. Oliphant's works.

"They're *none* genteel enough — oh, here's some one coming — I *must* find something."

A loud and tuneless whistle heralded the new-comer's approach. He was short and broad, and he came in with his hands in his pockets, and his hat on his head.

"My charge," murmured the Classical Dictionary with a sigh.

"Oh, jolly cosy, don't you know, and all that," observed the new-comer affably. "I suppose you're Boyne Carruthers, ain't you?"

The Classical Dictionary's eyes were fixed steadily on his charge's hat. Tom laughed boisterously, but he removed the hat.

"You know when you're well off, old chap, it's easy to see that."

Helen seized a book at random and left the room.

Later on in the evening Mrs. Stanley-Browne picked up the book.

"Why — why, Miss Alliston, really, this is *too* careless! I told you I could n't abide books about common folk, and you bring me one about — the — *slums*! Go and fetch another at once!"

Boyne rose. "Allow me" — he turned at the door — "slums are so fashionable nowadays," he observed casually, "there's a rage for them."

"Oh, I was only going to say that the slums are really very interesting. It's middle-class folk I can't stand," Mrs. Browne ejaculated hastily.

Tom gave a roar that shook the room. "Oh, ain't you rich, old girl? What d'you reckon we are, eh?"

Sara's black brows met in a frown.

"Really, Tom," she drawled, "you've got the manners of a stable-boy."

"Oh, stow it, Sarah, we're a family party here, don't you know? Mater, am I a stable-boy?"

He came across the room, and rubbed his ruddy cheek against his mother's.

"Darling, you're full of mischief," she said lovingly, "that's all."

That night up in her room Helen finished her letter to Pauline.

"It's such a lovely night, Pauline, such a beautiful, mysterious world I've been looking out at just now. I'm longing for the spring down here. It seems such ages since I have watched all the things born, and wondered over what a night — while I lazily slept — could bring forth. How I shall lordlily pity all you poor Derrys away in your little suburban rurality, overlaid with bricks and mortar, that you are so proud of. Those blessed Derrys! Tell Dulcie the piece of pale pink satin glimmers up at me every time I go to my sandal-wood box, and whispers things, only those I shall keep for my letter to her. I may send kisses to Pip and Dulcie and Peggy and the Cherub, may n't I? To Bubbles and Bunny I make my bow. My first day 'off' I am coming to see you all. Oh, what a nuisance I shall be getting rid of weeks of pent-up Derry-longing! Cuddle up that Cherub for me."

She paused there and looked towards the window. She had pulled up the blind that she might see out into the night. The pale moon beamed down benignly at her.

"Tom's tutor — the unfortunate man who is to try and din a little classical knowledge into his head, because, forsooth, 'that dear Lord Belmain' is strong on classics — arrived this afternoon. He is a gentleman, which is a boon. It's nearly twelve o'clock, so good-night."

The next morning she went down to the breakfast-room, to the heavy meal that ushered in the day at Stanley Hall, and found Sara and Tom bickering at the tops of their voices. It was a glorious morning in early March, and through Helen's open window there had stolen on the breeze, shy and elusive, a sweet foreshadowing scent of spring. It seemed to her a pity to bicker on such a morning. She listened wonderingly to the pettiness of it.

Tom tired of it at last. "Oh, shut up! Have it your own way! Morning, Miss Alliston; you look as fresh as a lily," he laughed boisterously. "What d'you think of

me, now, as a poet? I did n't say 'daisy,' don't you know — saw you were too jolly stately for a daisy."

From Sara, mingling with his laughter, came a rasping innuendo about his looks; she was engaged in getting the last word, a pastime dear to her.

Marian came in, looking half awake. After her rustled Mrs. Stanley-Browne, carrying Toby in her arms.

"Good-morning, my loves." Loud kisses echoed through the room, and Toby promptly began to bark.

"Bless 'im; he's saying good-morning!" exclaimed his mistress proudly.

"He says it pretty often, and good-afternoon and evening, too," observed Tom, with a wink to the company.

"Oh, he's got very good manners, has n't 'e, then? Miss Alliston, please give him 'is slices of bread and butter. Does he want 'is bekky, then? So he shall, then. Good-morning, Capting Carruthers; I hope you'll find something on the table you can fancy."

Helen saw him pause as the hot scented air struck against his face; she saw his eye go to Toby, who was barking at him furiously, and she smiled.

She put the plate of bread and butter down on the floor, and the barks gave place to gobbles and gurgles.

Hope lit in Boyne's eye; he glanced at her; she shook her head sadly. He understood that Toby had no intention of choking to death, and turned with gloomy politeness to Mrs. Browne. She informed him that Tom's first lesson was to begin at ten-thirty sharp, whereupon Tom grinned. "Fancy expecting *me* to turn into a classical chap! You'll have a pretty tough job to do it, old man. I'm not like Lord Belmain, don't you know."

"No," said Boyne Carruthers.

"Mater and the girls wanted it — anything to oblige — but I don't fancy it'll be much of a success."

"It's beastly to be so awfully ignorant," observed Sara.

"You're a dear good boy, and don't do yourself justice," his mother interposed fondly. "It's all your fun, and it's so awkward," turning to the classical tutor, "and so 'gorsh' not to know what his lordship's talking about when he mentions some Greek god like Macbeth or Homer."

## AT STANLEY HALL

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Boyne agreed pleasantly.

After breakfast Helen accompanied her to the blue morning-room, and read the papers to her.

She knew Mrs. Browne was not listening. Helen always pitied her in those hours after breakfast. She could see the longing that possessed her to be up and doing; the wearisomeness of sitting idle, "like a fine lady." She saw, in the restless glances towards the door, the involuntary rubbing of a finger along the mahogany after dust, the uneasy movements of the idle hands, and the aimless wanderings from room to room, how old habits clung, and bade her go and set her house in order.

Towards the end of the morning Helen was told to go down to the drawing-rooms and arrange the flowers. It was the one duty, amongst a myriad of worrying, wearisome duties, that she liked. She went gaily down, and into the green-houses.

When she had finished arranging the flowers, she came out into the hall. She glanced towards the door that led into the gardens at the back, and paused.

Boyne emerged from the study.

"Let me come, too, Miss Alliston," he besought her. "I've been trying all the morning to din something into Thomas's wooden head."

"Very well. I am going to Mrs. Stanley-Browne."

"I wish we were older friends."

"Why?"

"That I might accuse you of — well, I dare n't yet."

"How did you know I was n't going to her?"

He sighed.

"That would be too personal yet awhile, too, I'm afraid."

She laughed.

"Well, where am I going?"

"Somewhere nice. The garden?"

"There is an almond tree in blossom — I saw it this morning from my window."

"Ah, that's it. You'll show it to me? Only you must put something round you."

"Oh," she laughed, "I'm not rheumatic yet," and made her way into the garden.

He followed her. "This is better than the library."

"Poor Tom!"

"You're cruel. Surely it should be poor me?"

"No. I can imagine the treatment Tom received."

He smiled grimly.

"I was patience personified."

She went beneath the almond tree, and looked up at the pink blossoms outlined against a pale blue sky, flecked with grey clouds.

"I'm glad you have it from your window," he said impulsively.

"Is n't Nature kind — endlessly kind? If all this," she waved her hand around, "were left to the Stanley-Browne's —"

"What a gruesome idea! Don't! I see polite little trees with pink and blue leaves —"

"And primroses growing straight and trim in a correct bed —"

"Pardon; they would n't have primroses."

"No; I suppose they *would* be too plebeian."

Presently she turned to him tragically.

"Don't say another word! Surely we have sounded the deepest depths in that."

"Primroses too plebeian!" he mused; "yes, it will do."

## CHAPTER X

### BOYNE

"EVERY one," observed Boyne, "goes in for reading, nowadays."

"Yes; I read a great deal myself," responded Mrs. Stanley-Browne complacently.

Boyne glanced across her to the lady companion; but Helen's head was bent decorously over her work. He studied the heavy waves of dark hair, then remarked:

"It's an age of luxury."

For a moment the down-bent head was raised; grey

eyes accused him whimsically of parrot sententiousness, then reverted to the embroidery.

He smiled.

They were sitting in the blue drawing-room by the open window; it was almost as warm as in summer that March afternoon.

"Oh, yes, of course; luxuries are necessary for genteel folk," quoth Mrs. Browne amiably. She had lunched well, her dress was a wonder of up-to-dateness; she felt sleepy, and at peace with all mankind.

"I was thinking, more especially, of luxurious bindings," remarked Boyne.

"Oh, yes," with drowsy vagueness.

"Books have such beautiful bindings nowadays," he pursued. "But they're getting too luxurious, I think — the publishers, I mean. It's all very well to bring out Tennyson and Browning in beautiful little editions, but when it comes to cyclopædias —" the pleasant, lazy voice paused.

Helen unpicked Sara's wrong stitches industriously.

"Oh, yes, when it comes to cyclopedies," echoed Mrs. Browne vaguely.

Boyne was leaning back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes on Helen.

"Why, I saw one lately, Mrs. Stanley-Browne — it was a pocket edition, you know, slim and tall, as beautiful as a poem —"

"What colour?" she asked comfortably.

"Well, there's a charming edition brought out just now — a sort of misty grey with a white border — suits it splendidly, too."

"But I thought you did n't approve of cyclopedies being got up so grand?"

"Oh, certainly, I approve of them," firmly; "it's a bit bewildering to an ordinary mortal to find a book like that is a cyclopædia, that's all."

The lady-companion spoke softly. "They don't bring out most serious books so incongruously," she said. "I saw a classical dictionary lately —"

"Yes?" said Boyne.

She raised her eyes from her work, and looked at him gravely.



"It was plain and dull and heavy," she said.  
His eyes twinkled. "Had it sharp corners?" he queried.  
"The cyclopædia had."

"I don't think so, but it was — audacious."

"How? Since it was so plain —"

"Ah," Mrs. Browne struck in sleepily, "she don't appreciate good books. Now Lord Belmain — he is such a nice young fellow, and *such* a friend of Tom's — now, *he* spends nearly all his time studying the classics. Tom's fond of them, too, for all 'is fun. He said to me this morning, 'Mater' — that's their French way of talking, you know, nowadays — 'Mater,' he said, 'who was Pom —' something or other. I know it was something to do with pills."

"Pompilius — Numa Pompilius?" Boyne suggested.

"That's it! That's what comes of learning! Not but what you're paid to know it, of course; so it's only nat'ral you should," her voice trailed drowsily.

Silence reigned then in the room.

Helen dropped her embroidery, and looked out longingly across the lawns to where a free and lovely world lay sunnily waiting.

Boyne spoke gently. "It's astonishing how nearly all ladies lie down in the afternoon, nowadays."

Helen's eyes leapt swiftly to his face.

Mrs. Browne stirred. "Well, it's very comfortable 'ere," she said in an obstinate tone.

"Oh, very! You know Lady Griddleston? how young she looks? Well, she declares it's owing to her habit of going to her room and lying down in the afternoon for an hour — no, two — *three* hours!"

"How can she, when she'd 'ave to go visiting, and receiving folks?"

"Oh," patiently, "on those days she can't, but she makes up for it when she *can*. It has come to be a recognised thing amongst the aristocracy;" he did not blench.

"Well, I must say I like a nap myself in the afternoon, and I was just thinking of going now —" she began to rise.

He got up, and helped her. He opened the door, shut it after her, then came back to the window.

Helen was standing half out on the verandah. She

looked at him, and they laughed. She raised her arms above her head with a beautiful gesture of freedom.

"I'm horribly ashamed of you," she said.

"Go and put on a hat and coat."

She went across to the door. In the hall she looked back at him, laughing. "They won't be back till five," she said.

In a few minutes they were out in a cosy lane, where the blackthorn, sheltered and warm, was bursting into snowy clouds of blossom.

"I wonder," she said, "whether, if I were a poet, I could ever think of anything beautiful to say about it that has never been said before."

"You're thinking something original now, I believe."

She laughed softly. "When I was a child I wrote a verse about it. I remember it now."

"Tell me."

She quoted:

"Oh, little white blossoms on black  
With sun shining through your petals  
Thou art sweet & no beauty doth lack  
Oh, Spring has come!"

"It's certainly original."

"So was the spelling, I believe. But the feeling — oh, it was immense. We had had a long wet winter. In the winter Thorpe," a little shiver went through her, "was very gloomy. I remember the passion of longing for spring. I used to count the days, day after day, on a calendar — it was an advertisement of Mehawning's Tea — a large sheet with a negress drinking from a huge cup of tea."

She walked on thoughtfully.

"I feel awfully sorry for that child," he said gently.

"So do I!" she laughed. "Ah, well it was a glad day, at any rate — the day she wrote her immortal verse on the blackthorn. Oh, the joy that swelled her poor little soul! I can feel now that wild rush —"

"Spring has come!"

"Did it last? I hope it lasted."

"The spring? No. It was only March, you know, and

the cold and wet and wind came back again, and gave me a cold. The dreariness of that cold! The horrible concoctions Mary McGregor dosed one with!" She laughed. "It showed a truly poetic soul that I should have longed for the spring, for, in our childish days, spring meant, beyond primroses and violets, McGregor concoctions. I wish I could brew you some."

"What have I done?"

"What had *we* done?"

He said shrewdly, "Did you drink your sister's, as well as your own?"

"How did you know? But not often; Mary mostly kept a lynx eye upon us during the dosing."

"I don't remember being dosed myself," he observed.

"Perhaps," she said, with a curious gladness in the saying of it, "you did n't need it. You look strong."

"Oh, I'm strong. I can't lay any claim to your pity; even my childish ailments are merely a memory of extra toys and petting."

She thought it was glorious for a man to be strong. Glancing at his broad shoulders, his lithe shape, the proportion of his frame, seeing the well-knit look about him, she thought what a waste his present life was. She wondered again why he had left the army.

Musing, she said out quickly, "I can't think why you took this post!"

"I don't quite know myself."

With a faint flush on her cheeks she turned the conversation.

"Don't you wish we had brought Toby with us?"

"I'm pining for him. You don't know Belmain, 'dear Lord Belmain,' do you?" he went on.

"No."

"Well, he got me this post. I was at a loose end, and I had n't any money—I'd lost it in a big speculation—and I wanted time to look round a bit. You can't look round with no money, you know. So Belmain wrote about Tom's thirst for classical knowledge, and asked me whether I thought it worth while. That's how it was. It was as good as anything else."

"And you are looking round?"

"Yes," he said, "that's it."

They were making their way to a certain sheltered bank where she thought she might find some early primroses.

"Belmain's a family friend of the Brownes," he said, — "old Silas Browne, the man who made the money, Mrs. Browne's brother-in-law, kept a little grocer's shop in Terrington village. His place is at Terrington, you know. Well, old Silas discovered that by mixing other people's pickles he could make a gruesome pickle of his own. He did it up in bottles, devised a glaring label to embellish the bottles, called it 'The Parisian Pickle,' and the P.P. for short, and made a fortune out of it. He was n't like his relations — the Stanley-Browne's — this old man, for he lived on at that little shop — he was a bachelor — while the money accumulated, and his only extravagance was ginger-beer. That killed him at last, and he left all the money to these people. That's about a year ago now."

"I daresay a year ago Mrs. Stanley-Browne was a sensible, hard-working matron, and oh, so much happier!"

"Most estimable, I daresay. The reason why Tom is not quite such an out-and-out cockney as the others is because his Uncle Silas had a weakness for him — there's no accounting for tastes, you know — and used to have him down in Terrington for months at a time. Miss Alliston, let's talk of the weather."

"Is n't it a beautiful day? So mild!"

They laughed.

Deep down in the wet depths of a grassy bank she spied a single primrose, pale, long-stemmed, beseeching.

She stayed him as he stooped.

"Leave it there. I'm like the proper little boys with birds' eggs — I only take a few from the multitude. And look at her poor little children all round her. To leave them orphans!"

"I'm an orphan too," he suggested; "yet you don't look at me like that."

"I would if you were as sweet as a primrose bud."

Over in the west the sun, a great, red ball, was sinking — sinking.

"We must go back," she said.

"A little further," he urged; "just to that old red wall with the almond blossom above it. I want to sweeten myself, you know."

"Not even for that can I stand Mrs. Browne's — and possibly Sara's — wrath."

They turned back. He was frowning.

"I do loathe civilisation," he observed savagely.

"It's rather startling."

He smiled. "Well, I want to interfere, and you'd think I was impertinent."

"No, I won't."

He was silent; then — "Must you stay at Stanley Hall?" he asked.

She answered simply, "I found it so difficult to get anywhere at all. When my grandfather died there was practically nothing for my sister and myself; anyway, it's gone long ago. And you see, I have not been educated well — I have no certificates. It's such an aggravatingly certificate age, is n't it? My sister is married — I told you — and I — well, I like — 'oh, sir, I like my liberty.'"

"Liberty at Stanley Hall."

"Yes, liberty at Stanley Hall, and, at your peril, pity me! I refuse to be pitied."

"I should n't think there were many bold enough to pity you."

"And yet you do."

"Yes."

They walked in silence. The day was shadowing into evening; a soft pearly mist was creeping over the landscape, giving a glamour, a mystery, to the fields and hedges; from out it the tall poplars stretched bare, black arms; the blackthorn hedge gleamed white and cold. Then suddenly, as they drew near, the mist grew rosy pink, and the blackthorn blushed in greeting; every delicate blossom was aglow. They paused, then turned and looked back to the west. The sun was sinking in a great red glory, shot with gold. The whole world lay hushed in a wonderful pink light.

They stood a few minutes, then Helen turned and walked on. She gave a quick little sigh.

"There will be other sunsets," he suggested gently.

"Yes; and Stanley Hall is, after all, only an episode."

"You 'll never keep at that level, I 'm afraid."

"Well — I 'll try."

"Oh, you 've plenty of pluck."

"I shall need it now. We're late."

Before them Stanley Hall loomed, its glaring black and white squares softened by the pink-grey mist.

She started to run. She gave a little whimsical laugh as she entered the hall. "That blackthorn in the mist — and *this!*"

He stood and watched her as she sped up the stairs.

At the top of the flight Marian hovered.

"Oh, you 've come back! Be quick — I wanted to hurry you. Ma is just beginning to ask for you."

Helen pondered the unexpected kindness gratefully as she flung off her hat and coat.

That night Marian came to her room. On admittance she stood flushing awkwardly. "I — I was n't sleepy. I thought I'd come for a chat, if you did n't mind."

Helen was startled. She brushed back her hair and braced herself beneath the condescension.

"Oh, of course not; where will you sit?"

Marian plumped herself solidly down into a chair, and stared at her.

"Sarra said it was n't all your own hair. Are n't you going to sit down?"

She sat down meekly.

"You're lucky to have a fire up here," Marian pursued, flinging back the gorgeous folds of her dressing-gown. "Ma was n't going to let you have one, but directly Tom had seen you, he declared he'd come and light it himself if she did n't tell the servants to! Tom's got such a spirit," proudly; "he'd do it if he said he would!"

"It was very kind of him." Helen assured herself too that it was very kind.

Marian meandered on a little while about Tom. The note of genuine enthusiasm in her monotonous voice interested Helen. She studied the figure opposite her as long as she dared trust her gravity, then she looked into the fire.

Suddenly Marian paused and sighed loudly; then she studied the fire with a sentimental gaze.

## HELEN ALLISTON

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A conviction flashed across Helen that she was going to confide in her. She waited expectantly.

"Do you see things in a fire?" queried Marian.

"Oh, yes, coal and flames," cheerfully.

"Is that all?" she sighed deeply. Then in an ingratiating whisper, "Did you have a nice walk this afternoon, *dear*?"

Helen wondered had she jumped. She said, "Oh, rather chilly," in a casual tone, and Marian eyed her reproachfully. Helen sat ready; she pondered whether this could be the usual sort of opening to confidences. When Marian went on in a sentimental tone she was sure it was.

"I like it a little later myself, when all the little birds are mating, and shady nooks, and flowers coming out — it seems more suitable then."

"Oh, I think a walk's always suitable. I believe you are getting sleepy."

"Oh, no! I," sighing, "don't sleep very well. I lie awake and think."

"Indigestion," Helen said. "Have you tried French's 'Salvo'?"

"It's nothing to do with indigestion," Marian's voice was tart, "it's thinking."

"Indigestion often goes to the head," soothingly; "all the doctors say so —"

Marian interrupted — the Stanley-Browne voice was a born interrupter — "Do you think money and rank's better than honest love?"

"Is that what you think about? That is indigestion. I wish you would try French's —"

"I think you are very unkind." Marian's voice shook; she sniffed pathetically. "I'm misunderstood at home," she said; "no one really understands me. I thought you would —"

Helen decided humourously that truly she had not known herself. She had not thought Marian and she were twin souls. The Stanley-Browne household was a good one for knocking down decent walls of self-respect.

"Sarra," Marian pursued, "is so proud and haughty. She's ambitious and will marry a duke. Ma thinks I shall do the same — p'raps I will, but it's wrong to scorn a poor man's honest love. What would you do, dear?"

"Oh, I? I'm only the lady-companion, you see; our positions are so different," Helen said meekly.

"Yes, that's true, of course; you can follow your own heart—" she paused, and sighed.

"And you want to follow some one else's," Helen said *sotto voce*.

"Eh? Of course, there's my position to be taken into account. I owe something to myself now. It's so different with you; not but what any one can see you're a lady—"

"Do you really think so?"

"Oh, yes! Don't you fret—it often happens in books that the poor governesses and companions carry off a duke, but they're generally very beautiful, with violet eyes that flash and melt alternately, and golden hair. Of course you're not bad-looking—"

"I shall be if I stay up any longer," she said suddenly. She felt she could not stand Marian any more that night, funny as she was.

"Oh, I have n't half done yet! You don't know what it is to me to find a congenial soul."

Helen bowed her head to it.

"And I'm talking for your good, I'm sure. Don't break humble hearts on your way to—to—"

"Bed," Helen said. She rose. "Good-night."

Marian blinked up at her stolidly. "To a lord's coronet," she finished. "Are you really dreadfully tired?"

"Yes; and if I do not go to bed now—this very minute"—with desperation, "I shall not be fit for my duties to-morrow."

She had touched the right chord at last.

Marian rose hurriedly. "Oh, that would never do! Good-night, dear!" She took a step forward and stood staring, flushing uncomfortably.

Helen, tall and grave, looked back at her. "Good-night," she said.

Marian turned with a hurried stumble, knocked a book from a chair, and made for the door. "Er—good-night!" and she was gone.

Helen stood a minute gazing at the door, fearing to see it reopen. Then she crept across the room, turned the key



in the lock, and sank down into a chair. "She was going to kiss me! I saw it in her eye! I wonder what I should have done if she had?" She laughed helplessly. The whole scene was before her. "To think that Marian is pining beneath a love for an humble admirer! Pining in curling-pins and red satin padded slippers!"

A longing seized her to tell it to Boyne Carruthers. How he would enjoy it!

"I wish I had no sense of honour! I cannot tell him *all*."

She rose and stretched her arms above her head. "Poor Marian! I suppose it is all real to her."

Lying in bed, with shadows flickering mysterious and friendly, over walls and ceiling, with the cosy crackles of the dying fire lulling her to sleep, she felt a gratitude to Tom, which made her smile.

The glow of the fire changed subtly to a rose pink; the room was filled with soft showers of blackthorn blossom, blushing beneath the good-night kiss of the setting sun. They came close—they surrounded her—touched her face, her hair, her hands—she rested in a bed of sun-kissed blossom. It was a beautiful feeling. The softness and fragrance brought deep happiness to her. She had never before been quite so happy as she was then.

Smiling, she slept.

## CHAPTER XI

### TOM

ONE day after luncheon Mrs. Stanley-Browne, probably urged thereto by Sara, saw fit to give Helen a warning. She began: "Of course Tom's in a very good position, and being such an edible 'party,' I have to be very careful about designing minxes and all that sort of thing."

Helen listened politely, or rather she gave the correct impression of listening politely. In reality she was absorbed

in watching a tiny piece of vivid blue sky that was peeping through the misty grey clouds. It was so very blue, so very vivid for that time of year, and for such a grey day.

Mrs. Browne meandered on about Tom's various perfections, and the attraction he had always possessed for "gals," — about his gallantry and his not "meaning anything by it."

Helen sighed because the little bit of blue sky, abashed at the grey-clad earth beneath, had hidden again behind the clouds.

Toby awoke, yawned, eyed the window, then began to bark lustily.

"Does 'e want to go for a walk then, Titsie boy? Well, I must go and lie down. I can't get along at all, somehow, without a rest in the afternoon. You might take him for a walk, Miss Alliston. I don't think the mist will hurt 'im, and he wants to go so bad, and mind you be careful and don't overtire him, my dear. Does 'e want to go for a walk then, poor ickle Titsie then?"

At the door she paused and looked back. "So it's all right about Tom," she said; "and don't you forget I've warned you, my dear!"

Helen stood and stared in front of her, while the door slowly shut.

"Oh!" she breathed; "oh!"

Toby yelped and barked unheeded. The room seemed to stifle her. She turned and went out into the corridor. Down in the hall Boyne was standing; he looked up at her and smiled. He came lightly up the stairs, and with his coming she felt the old sense of gladness, of relief. She thought, too, that he had the kindest eyes she had ever seen.

"You 'll come out?" he said in a low voice.

"I've to exercise Toby."

He made a wry face.

"And for that I've been dodging Sarah ever since luncheon, and waiting behind the clock down there!"

She laughed.

"You need not come."

"Wrap up well," he said; "there's a raw mist."

As they went down the drive she looked back, and saw

Marian's face pressed against the drawing-room window-pane.

She gave a little laugh.

"I see possibilities in this mist," Boyne observed grimly, — "possibilities connected with dear Toby."

She glanced anxiously over her shoulder.

"Oh, you need n't look; you can hear him."

"We'll keep to 'unfrequented lanes,'" she laughed. "I don't want to see him run over."

"Well I don't want to *see* him run over," Boyne suggested; "not particularly, anyway."

"I should think this mist would be bad for his asthma."

"Ah, a less painful loop-hole."

"You'll feel more bloodthirsty when you have to carry him home."

"I, carry that fat beast? Miss Alliston, you degrade me by the mere suggestion."

"I had to the other day. You wait and see."

They were beyond the drive now, in a damp lane that smelt sweetly of wet mould.

"You'll tell me now, won't you?" he said.

"Oh, it was nothing. I've been warned not to build on Tom's 'little goings-on'—I think that was the phrase."

"Who warned you?"

She glanced at him and smiled.

"You mistake. It's not a tragedy, it's a comedy."

"The wit is too subtle for me."

"Oh, well, if you are going to take it like that —"

A pause.

"Miss Alliston, I'll take it any way you like; but do tell me who had the infernal—the charming wit—to warn you?"

"Mrs. Browne."

He muttered something that had a bad sound about it, she thought.

"Oh," she exclaimed; "and a little bit of blue sky came and made me so sweet and complacent. I was thinking about it—it did n't dawn on me then that I was being warned."

"Of course not."

"Oh, I don't know. Mrs. Browne is not deep. I might have known."

The mist beat rawly against their faces; it exhilarated her.

"You're horribly dense," she said; "you ought to see the humour of it."

"Well, I don't."

"You sound awfully bad-tempered."

"I am."

She mused.

"I'm not."

"You rise above me."

Her gay voice answered, "Oh, I do! I feel quite amiable and good. I can see beauties in this mist. You can't."

"No, I can't."

"You are not a true artist then, to let your eyes be blinded with temper!"

"Well, they are. Did n't you tell her she was an impertinent —"

"I was absolutely sweet."

"Through the blue sky?"

"Yes," she added quickly. "Let's talk about the weather."

"I have n't said anything yet."

"You are making it too important. Who is Tom? Who is Mrs. Browne?"

He laughed with deep enjoyment.

"I wish they could have heard that!"

"It's true, is n't it?"

"Oh, quite. Give me time. I'm rising, only, you see, it's you —"

"Now, can't you see the wonderful light piercing through that whirl of mist there?" her voice was hurried.

"Yes, I see it. Please, I'm good now."

Presently he said persuasively, "You might talk to me. Tell me about the Derrys."

She shook her head. "I think I don't want to talk. You talk."

"When I was five years old I had the scarlet fever."

"Was your mother alive then?"

"Yes. I had a good time till I was twelve. She died then. My father I hardly remember. I have n't many relations. My cousins — the Morley Carruthers — have

the old place down in Devon — there are six lives between me and Stagford. Rather a hopeless lookout, is n't it? Shall I go on? Well, I was in the —th Lancers, and I got a scratch, — it was such an ignominious scratch, Miss Alliston, in one of those little by-plays out in the wilds beyond India. Doubt if the affair was even mentioned in the papers. There, 'Life of Boyne Carruthers,' by himself. I'm getting quite modern."

She filled in awhile, then she said hesitatingly, "Was it a bad — scratch?"

"Oh, no; but awkward. It was in my left side, and it was a long job — knocked me all to pieces. In the end I had to clear out."

She turned towards him with a little soft exclamation.

"Oh!" she said; "oh, how sorry I am!"

He dropped his careless tone.

"Thanks," he said simply.

Presently he added, "It was a bit dull at first. I felt lost somehow, that's how it was I plunged into speculation — and lost."

"I see."

He said nothing. They were silent awhile.

Helen was thinking of it all, feeling acutely the awful blank his life had been to him on the day he sent in his papers; the inanity — the meaninglessness of the days that followed; the sickening loathing of it all — the plunging into speculation to get away from it. And it had brought him to Stanley Hall!

"Oh," she said, "and Stanley Hall!"

"And you," he added in a low voice.

She laughed. "Yes, you hardly bargained for an Etiquette Cyclopædia."

"No, I did n't."

"I hope you find it useful."

"I find it very interesting."

"It's nothing to some I've seen. Mr. Derrington had an etiquette book compiled in George II.'s reign. It was exquisite."

"I prefer the modern Cyclopædia."

"Have you seen any ancient ones?"

"Yes."

"I'm ashamed of your being so Philistine."

"I'm not a bit ashamed myself."

A smile crept to her eyes.

"I can't see you ashamed."

He pondered.

"How am I to take that?"

"As it pleases you."

"Very well," equably; "now won't you talk?"

He turned down a side road.

She stood still. "Where are you going?"

"I want to show you a tree."

"Is it far?"

"No, really."

They turned down the road.

"It's the tracery against the sky I want you to see. I think it's the most delicate I've ever seen."

From out the mist came the hoot-toot of a motor car.

"Toby!" Helen exclaimed; "oh, *get* him —"

Toby stood in the middle of the road and wheezed at them. The motor loomed dimly in the distance. Boyne strode forward and picked the pug up by the scruff of his neck.

Helen drew a long breath. "Oh, motors are fiendish!"

"So are pugs," observed Boyne, holding that particular pug out at arm's length.

A voice accosted them. "Boyne Carruthers, is that you?"

"Carlotta!"

The car stopped. Boyne went forward.

"Carlotta, I'd be ashamed to motor at a snail's pace."

"What does that mean?"

He held forth Toby, gasping and gurgling. She laughed a low, deep laugh that struck Helen pleasantly.

She interposed in terror of imminent death for the pug.

"Captain Carruthers, look at his eyes! They're bulging so horribly."

"They always do. Carlotta, this is a young lady from Stanley Hall."

There was a pause. Helen had a general impression of vivid dark eyes gleaming from out motor wrappings at her.

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"Miss Alliston," Boyne pursued imperturbably, "this is an old friend — Mrs. Waring."

There was another laugh from the motorist.

"Boyne, you're hateful. I *knew* she was n't a Stanley-Browne!"

"I may be a life-long friend," Helen observed.

"I'll risk it. Will you come and see me? Need I call first? Think I'm an invalid — crippled with rheumatism. The Brownes are not thin-skinned, from all I hear. If I'm offending you, forgive me. Boyne, Aunt Charlotte says you have n't been near her. Do tell me," to Helen, "how you come to be at Stanley Hall?"

"Oh," Helen laughed, "how indiscreet you are!"

"Brava, Miss Alliston! Carlotta, she's a lightning character perceiver."

"Don't frivol. Come nearer, will you? Out there in the mist you loom like some mysterious spirit. You will come and see me, will you not? I'm staying at Mrs. Delaney's cottage. I'm racked half my time with neuralgia, so I'll go."

"Is it a new remedy — motoring in a raw mist?" Boyne asked.

"Oh, man — man — man! You disapprove, and yet keep me here by asking questions!"

He called after the motor — "Carlotta, may I come, too?"

Borne back to them on the mist her deep-toned answer came, "Do I ever want you?"

"Is she pretty?" Helen asked.

"No; but you'll think she is when you're with her."

"Shall I? I won't come to see your tree, I think. I dare n't be late."

"It's only a few yards."

She turned back. "Another time. I think the mist is thickening."

Concern crept into his voice. "Are you cold? We'll hurry. I wish I had something —"

"I don't want anything. I hate to be wrapped up like a mummy."

They walked rapidly. The mist was creeping up, closing in on them. It struck her oddly that just so much of

him as that small clear patch around them did she know; beyond, in the mist, his life, his friends, lay.

"Surely it is very late?" she said.

He took out his watch.

"Half-past four."

"Is that all?"

"I'm sorry I took you so far."

"I took myself."

"I persuaded you."

"Oh, no; I persuaded myself."

In the gathering dusk and mist she could not see his face well, but she knew by his voice that he was frowning.

"Well, then," impatiently, "I ought not to have let you come."

"Really, you have hardly the power of allowing and preventing me, have you?"

"I can do a good deal," grimly, "when I put my mind to it."

"Not that," coldly.

His answer surprised her. "Yes, even that," he said.

"Really? Might one ask how you would do it?"

"Oh, certainly; physical strength and persuasion."

"Brute strength and impertinence, you mean."

"If you like."

"How absurd you are! You are, at least, a gentleman."

"Thanks; but gentlemen, you know, have primitive instincts that an emergency brings out."

"And the emergency?"

"The fear of your catching cold."

"Because a hoarse voice would offend your ear?"

He did not answer.

Suddenly she paused. "Toby! Oh, where's Toby?"

He looked round. "I thought the mist held possibilities."

"Oh, don't be tiresome. We shall have to go back. Whistle!"

He whistled in vain.

"Why did I rescue him from Carlotta's motor? Sentimental fool! Well, we've done our best — he'll find his way home all right."



"I dare n't go back without him. Besides, he might not be able to find his way."

"Oh, yes, he would. We're not to get rid of him so easily. Come along; he's not worth your catching cold."

"We *must* go back."

"Very well, then, I will. You hurry straight on."

"No, I'll come too."

"I'm sorry to contradict you, but you won't!"

Through the mist came an unmistakable wheeze.

"Oh, here he is!" she exclaimed. "Come along, Toby!"

Toby loomed waddlingly into view, then squatted in the middle of the road, and yapped angrily.

Helen gave a sudden helpless little laugh.

"He wants to be carried!"

"He'll have to want, then;" Boyne's tone was grim. He turned and walked on.

"If you don't carry him, I shall have to," she said.

He glanced back at Toby.

"It's ridiculous to kow-tow to a beast like that."

"I daresay he is tired."

"Evidently you have found the way long and weary to-day."

"It is n't a very charming afternoon, is it?"

"No."

He commanded, entreated, coaxed Toby to come on, but in vain. Toby sat there, wheezing imperturbably.

To Helen's fancy, the heaving of his fat sides signified rude laughter; there was something irresistibly ludicrous in his squatting there in the mist.

"If you were n't tired and cold," Boyne said direfully, "I'd stay here all night with him, sooner than carry him to Stanley Hall."

"I can go back alone," she suggested amiably.

He strode forward and picked the pug up; he held him out at arm's length and began walking on briskly.

Helen interposed. "He really will choke."

"I hope so."

Toby's short legs were performing wild gesticulations; his fat body wriggled; he wheezed and gasped; his eyes came out of his head about half an inch further than usual.

"Really," she said, "it's cruel to hold him like that."

"How else can I hold him? I'm not going to have his dirty little feet in my waistcoat."

She stood still.

"Give him to me, then."

"You've a sudden affection for him?"

"No. Are you not going to give him to me?"

"No."

"Really, I *am* tired of this walk."

With an energy that apparently benumbed Toby into quietude, Boyne took him to his bosom, and hugged him. He laughed savagely, "Shall we go on?"

When they reached the hall, brilliantly lit on account of the mist, she glanced at him, and suddenly she smiled.

"Oh," she murmured, "you do look cross!"

He looked down into her face; his eyes smiled warmly, though his lips were grave.

"I am," he said.

"And all about a little dog!"

"Ah," he said, "all about a little dog!"

Toby was investigating the hall with wheezy sniffs.

Boyne's eyes were on Helen.

Her head was tilted back, the light shone on her radiant face. He laughed a little caressing laugh. "You're not tired or cold either."

She went up the stairs. "Ah, I always wear a brave front!" She paused and looked down at him. "Tell me, who is Mrs. Waring?"

"Oh, Carlotta can't be done off like that. She's a book."

"Give me the preface then."

He quoted reproachfully, "'To make a preface to a book appears in the same light as to make a number of bows and scrapes as you enter a room.'"

"That only applies to one's *own* preface."

"I refuse to make a preface to Carlotta. I'll tell you about her. It will take some time," insinuatingly; "when will you let me tell you?"

She laughed lightly.

"'He that will not when he may,' —" and disappeared round the bend of the staircase.

Later, listening within his door, he heard the faint, soft

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swish of a gown that heralded no one's approach but Helen's. He went out and waited for her.

"Thomas looks horrid," he said; "shall I ask for an evening upstairs for you?"

"Has he upset the dog-cart?"

"Yes; and hit a tree with his nose and brow."

"He has courage anyway, has n't he?"

"I don't know. It never struck me."

She moved slowly down the stairs.

"It did me, because I have n't much of it."

"Do you know, I'm going to invest in a penny notebook to-morrow."

"Rank extravagance!"

"No; it's a necessity. In it I'm going to jot down all the things I want to say to you, and have to save up till I've known you longer."

"It sounds ominous."

"Oh, they're good and bad; it will be a goodly list. One has to be so careful with a Cyclopædia on Etiquette, you see! Can you inform me how much longer I shall have to wait?"

Laughing, she entered the drawing-room. Sara was standing before a mirror, patting and pulling out her hair. She turned, with a common movement of shoulders and body, and smiled archly at Boyne.

"I was n't looking at myself," she said.

"Were n't you?"

His refusal to pay the compliment waited for was almost as open as if he had declined in words.

"No, I was n't! Though some people do say I've plenty of excuse! Miss Alliston, go up to my room and fetch my red and gold fan, please."

Boyne, ringing the bell, observed blandly, "Did you ask me to ring for a fan? I hardly heard."

She flushed scarlet.

"I believe you're doing it on purpose."

William stood waiting in the doorway. She said sullenly, "Go and ask my maid to bring me my red and gold fan!" Then she laughed loudly, "Oh, see Miss Alliston sitting there so grand! Who'd think she takes her wages every month, like the servants?"

"Would n't people think I did either?" Boyne asked.

"Oh, you! It's my belief you're doing it for a spree!"

"Ah," he said; he looked round the room, then very expressively at Helen, "perhaps that's it."

Helen joined in gaily, "You are so lucky! You can come down to dinner night after night in the same suit, while I—" she sighed, "the poor lady-companion must make an occasional change to keep up appearances."

"You don't make many, anyway," Sara put in rudely.

Boyne turned to her, engaged her in conversation, and left Helen free.

Tom was a comical sight that evening; his brow was bandaged, his nose was swollen. But he seemed in capital spirits.

"Who was it gave you water and looked after you, did you say, Tom dear?" Marian inquired.

"Oh, some people at a farm. Broke the mare's knees, old chap," to Boyne; "bad business."

Helen smiled as she saw Boyne for once in interested conversation with Tom; it struck her that if "children form a bond of interest between all women," as she had read somewhere, horses fill the same office with men.

When they paused Marian said patiently, "What farm was it, Tom dear?"

"Oh, out Woodleigh way; awfully kind sort of people."

"They would be only too pleased to do anything for you, dear, of course," his mother said.

"I don't see why. I was a stranger to them."

"Oh, bless you, they'd be sure to know Mr. Stanley-Browne of Stanley Hall, my dear."

"They did n't, anyway, then;" Tom looked cross.

"They had n't the faintest idea who I was, and they were just about as jolly kind as they could be."

"Umph! Was there a pretty farm-girl there?" demanded Sara.

Tom reddened till his very ears looked to tingle.

"They were jolly kind," he muttered doggedly, "and you can stow that, Sarah!"

After dinner he came and sat beside Helen. Remembering her warning, she wished he would go away. But Tom was in an oddly subdued mood; he talked about the

moon and the sermon of last Sunday. She rose and went to the piano, whereupon he begged to be allowed to "turn over" for her; she refused gently.

Boyne came to the piano. She smiled up at him as she sat down. "Please go. I'm going to turn over for myself."

"Don't be so unkind."

"I'm not. It's because I'm kind. I refused to let Tom do it. See?"

He smiled ironically. "Tom is evidently in favour to-night."

"Do you know he has quite pretty eyes?"

He refused to smile.

"You know, Miss Alliston, I'm years older than you."

"Which means you are going to say something you've no right to say."

"Well — right — of course I have n't any right, but —"

"You feel paternal? Well, go on."

"If you give Tom an inch he'll take an ell."

She considered.

"But I only gave him half an inch, you see, because I don't see why his mother's sins should be visited on his head, and I know now not to indulge in vain hopes, you know."

"What has he done to get into such favour?"

"Well, he has exerted himself to be polite."

He bowed. "I take it."

"Do you know," she said with a pretty confidential air, "I think *you* had better go and tumble against a tree?" And she broke into a gay waltz air.

"Mater," observed Sara, for the benefit of the company, "I should n't wonder if George Austen looks in to-night. I can't keep them away!"

George Austen did look in. He was a vacuous young man with one strong thing about him, — his desire for money. His relations thought that Sara or Marian might help him to realise that desire, so they had asked him down to visit them, and did no more, beyond calling once on the Stanley-Brownes.

"Oh, nothing would offend them," they said; "you'll be welcomed with open arms!"

And George found that they were not far wrong. He wished fretfully that Mrs. Browne hadn't got such a deuced

pretty companion; she made the heiresses so beastly unattractive! He almost grew profound over it. He said to his cousin Violet, "It's beastly the way things are always wrong in this world."

She laughed lightly. "The wrong girl has the money?" she said. "I call that quite right and proper; it's a better division."

This same cousin, meeting Helen out one day, approached her with a frank laugh.

"Miss Alliston, I've been longing to meet you."

Helen smiled surprisedly. "It's good of you, anyway," she said.

"May I come with you a little way?"

"Oh, yes, do."

The girl walked beside her, swinging her hockey-stick; she glanced sideways at Helen with a shade of diffidence in her pretty freckled face that was not usual to it. Helen questioned her about her hockey; she answered absently.

"Oh, yes; jolly game. Yes, I'm reckoned rather a good player. No, I don't like golf so much. I like all games, really." She looked up laughing. "Feel my muscle, Miss Alliston!"

She was like a pretty school-boy. Helen felt she liked her.

"I wear out a fearful lot of clothes, — boots and shoes and things," the girl said mournfully; "and we're beastly hard-up always at home." She stuck her hands into her pockets, her stick beneath her arm. "I —" she said, and flushed a little and stopped.

Helen smiled kindly. "Well?"

The girl confronted her. "Look here, Miss Alliston, I'm never in awe of any one! I wanted to ask you for information about that creature up at that ridiculous Hall — I forget his name — Thomas, is n't it?"

"Oh," Helen said interestedly, "well, I don't know much about him, but I like what I do know very much; and he's very good-looking."

"Good heavens!" Violet Darcy's blue eyes opened wide and wider. "Well, one can never tell! I should n't have thought *you* would be like that."

"Why? He is always most obliging and amiable, and his manners are so quiet and respectful." She paused.

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"Is Mrs. Stanley-Browne thinking of getting rid of him, then?"

Violet Darcy grew slowly red.

"Who are you speaking of?" she blurted out, forgetful of a patient governess's years of grammar tuition.

"Why, the footman — Thomas."

Helen's tone expressed beautiful surprise.

"I did n't mean him." Violet looked rather sulky; she scanned Helen's innocent face suspiciously. "I meant Thomas Stanley-Browne." She shook back her scarlet tam-o'-shanter. "You see, I'm wondering if I'll marry him."

"Oh," Helen said, "is that all?"

The girl's face fell. "You need n't pretend you're not shocked," she said.

"Do you want me to pretend I *am*?"

She kicked a stone angrily with a square-toed shoe.

"I mean it. I'm about sick of screwing. I could bring that lump to my feet in a minute — I'd only have to remind him that some musty old Darcy fought in the crusades — but I don't know whether it's worth it. Do you think it is?"

"Whether you and Mr. Stanley-Browne would suit each other, do you mean?"

She flushed scarlet, and turning, strode off up the road, the way they had just come.

Helen watched the athletic figure disappear round the curve of the road; her eyes twinkled.

"You are very pretty, but I wonder if you are a day over seventeen? And you are spoilt, Miss Violet Darcy."

## CHAPTER XII

### HELEN ATTEMPTS TO WRITE

HELEN received a long, erratic letter from Pauline one evening. She treasured it as a bit of Derryland. But in it Pauline said, "I'm sorry you don't seem to be writing much. I told Jem, and he says, 'You *must*! Writers make their own opportunities.'"

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That worried her.

Leaning from her window the next morning she thought it over. She never seemed to have any time to write.

She watched the pink glow of the sun's beautiful rising fade from the skies.

Then she roused herself with a little shake; she felt irritated with Jem. What could he know of that insistent "Miss Alliston! Miss Alliston!" that she was only freed from when exercising Toby? Her only opportunities to write were when she came up to bed; and even then she did not feel secure. Marian might come knocking at any moment, with confidences to outpour.

She smiled ruefully as she wondered when she would summon up sufficient courage to launch some of her manuscripts again. She imagined keenly the interest that would be taken in their return. At Stanley Hall every little word, every action, was noticed, commented on. She thought with longing of the beautiful freedom that pertained in the "Red Cottage." She wondered what would be said here if she went to bed suddenly one evening before dinner. She never felt free; she knew she was watched; her letters scanned, herself discussed. The stiff, clock-work atmosphere, the pettiness of it all, appalled her. She marvelled that Boyne Carruthers should stay. She told herself that if she were a man, she would go forth and carry sandwich-boards sooner. Looking down from her window, out through the boughs of the trees, bursting into leaf, she saw him walking to and fro. Her face lightened, lips and eyes smiled. "I'm glad he stays," she mused, and watched him. He looked up and smiled. She went down and joined him.

"What were you thinking about?" she asked smiling.

"You."

"I'm not a very pleasant subject evidently; you were frowning horribly."

"I want some money," he said.

She sighed.

"I hate the importance of money. It makes me feel small and mean to realise it as well as I do."

"You could n't help realising it."



"Oh, I might, if I had a bigger soul."

He smiled. "It's your soul that makes you realise it."

"Oh, well, that's a comforting way of looking at it."

"Now if I were in a book," he pursued, "it would be all right. I should wake one fine morning to find myself — wealthy."

"A mine — an heiress — or relatives in a horrible railway accident?"

"Neither. Miss Alliston, I'm ashamed of you. Try again."

"Ah, I have it. A dear old woman to whom years ago you rendered some service."

"Right; only the old woman was an old man."

"It does n't group so well; still, it will do. Tell me about him."

"Oh, I happened to be around — it was out in Bombay, you know. Old chap landed — he'd lost his wife on the voyage out, poor old beggar, and he was as helpless as a baby, — a good deal more helpless, for a baby is artful enough to howl till it gets what it wants, — and this old man — Joseph Baldwin — had n't a grunt in him, much less a howl. He'd come in for some big legacy a year before, and his wife wanted to travel, so they'd started on the 'Albany.' I fancy they had been pretty wretched on the voyage anyway, and then her death, two days before he landed, had upset him horribly. He clung to me like a limpet till I saw him safe and sound on board a homeward-bound boat. I hope he reached his native land all right."

"I never heard any one tell a story so badly as you," was her comment. "Very soon I shall be as great an adept at 'filling in' as Pauline Derrington is."

"Joseph Baldwin has vanished into space; all that is mortal of him, literally, I should think, though Frances Belmain refuses to think so. She reads all the newspapers to find some such paragraph as, 'If Boyne Carruthers will communicate, etc.,' — you know the style."

"What would you do first if you did awake to find it had come true?"

"Well, it depends on the year. If it were leap-year, Frances would marry me, she says."

"And if it were not leap-year?"

His face settled suddenly into an earnestness that disconcerted her.

"Whatever year it was I know exactly what I should do."

"Oh, so do I! I should, first of all, buy a horse—a beauty—and ride and ride. Then I should buy books—and books—beautiful books—and pictures and flowers, for myself; and lovely things for those precious Derrys; and then I should go shopping with Pauline, and buy laces and chifions—silks and muslins for both of us; and then I would travel—I would go to Rome! I always long to go to Rome; and then I would go—oh, everywhere, and see everything. I'd find time to do a little charity in between, I hope," she laughed. "Oh, I'd do *everything*!—go to plays and concerts— And what I'm to do now is to go in and act the lady-companion."

"Just one minute more," he urged. "I had a note from Carlotta this morning. She never wrote a letter in her life. She wants to know how to get you without the Browne's. Now, Cyclopædia, is it possible?"

"It is n't etiquette," primly; "still—well, I'm a modern edition, you know, and believe in 'bonghominy.' And I'm businesslike, of course. Is Mrs. Waring connected in any way with the titled aristocracy?"

"Her husband's cousin, by marriage, is Sir Philip—no, not Sydney—Sir Philip Cathwood. How will that do, oh, etiquettal Cyclopædia?"

"I think it will do."

"She wants to ask you to dinner; she wrote to me to find out how to do it."

"Are you her legal adviser, or what?"

"Oh, general help, I think. I've known her since my petticoat days. We sucked the same surreptitious stick of peppermint."

"I'd like to go," she said.

Down the terrace steps, her body an apologetic curve, Marian came towards them. "Good-morning. I'm—I'm so sorry, but ma wants you, Miss Alliston—now—before breakfast." She followed Helen in. "You *won't* be angry with me for interrupting you, *will* you, dear? I could n't help it."

"Of course you could n't. Where is Mrs. Stanley-Browne?"

"Oh, you're just like the heroine, Lady Viola Trelawney, in this week's *Family Circle*! So proud and reserved!"

Marian's voice was almost awed; the loud whisper carried back to Boyne, and Helen suddenly laughed as her eyes met his.

Marian followed her. "I want to speak to you afterwards," she whispered with an aggressively secretive air, and furtive glances around; "it's very important, only it *must* be in *private*."

Helen foresaw the intrusion of a dressing-gowned apparition that night; she determined to give her an audience during the day, if possible. Sitting alone after luncheon with a wearisome length of Sara's embroidery to unpick, she saw her pass the window, and called to her.

Marian came and sat down heavily in a chair.

"There was something you wanted to say to me?" Helen suggested affably.

"Oh, not now! I—I could n't. I like the night-time best, don't you?"

"No; one is so apt to be sleepy then."

"Oh, do you think so? The night always makes me long to unburden my soul."

"Last week's *Family Circle*," annotated Helen inwardly. "Well, it makes me sleepy," she maintained prosaically, "so you had better tell me what you want now."

"P'raps I don't want anything, after all! I—I think I've changed my mind."

Helen heaved a premature sigh of relief.

There was a long silence; Marian dozed. A fly buzzing in her fringe roused her. She watched Helen lazily.

"Sarra's no good at embroidery, but it's fashionable now. She's been used to a lot of admiration," she added inconsequently. "Of course, she's very handsome, but—well, last night, when that Mr. Bryce dropped in—I mean, dear, it'd be pleasanter for you if you—you would just sit quietly in a corner."

"With my back to the room?"

"Oh, no! That would look so odd. But, you see—of course, the gentlemen admire Sarra awfully, really, only

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they've got a way of noticing you. I don't know why, I'm sure, and it makes Sarra mad. I had an aunt once who always said, 'Be stand-offish with the men; don't do anything for them; let them wait on you, and they'll think all the more of you.' And I believe she knew what she was talking about!"

"Very likely. Men are contrary animals."

Marian looked shocked.

"I don't think it's nice to call them animals!"

Helen unpicked with grim patience; Marian dozed again.

She roused presently to observe, "When you've done that, I want you to put on my new blue skirt, — it's got a long train, all frills, — and I want you to show me how to manage it."

She meandered on. Helen's mind was bent longingly on an episode for her novel that she had thought of suddenly at luncheon. She looked with deep distaste upon the embroidery; it should have been beautiful, clean sheets of Cambridge paper; the scissors should have been her dear old pen; the pin-cushion before her, her ink-pot. Oh, to be free to write when she willed! Just then that seemed to her the highest point in happiness. But she sat still, snipping and picking at Sara's tightly bungled stitches, while Marian's monotonous voice wandered on and on; and the awful crude greens and yellows of the cushion behind her head hit Helen afresh every time she glanced up. The embroidery was work with which she could not hurry; Sara's stitches were close and tight, and the slightest wavering of the scissors meant a tear, and a tear meant common abuse from Sara. Lately the amount of embroidery Sara gave her to unpick was appalling. She did not know that a malicious spite prompted the wrong stitches; that Sara had overheard her say she hated unpicking, and had, from that moment, become an ardent devotee to bungled embroidery.

That night George Austen and a Mrs. Smythe, a plump and condescending widow, with a taste and a purse that did not agree, came to dinner. The evening was long and tedious. The widow patronised her hostess, and tried to smile at Helen when a solecism was committed. Helen

looked back into the meaning face with a serene gaze that almost made Mrs. Smythe uncomfortable.

She stood at last in the sanctuary of her bedroom; she turned the key in the lock with a little laugh of joy. "A hundred Marians shall not rout me out to-night!"

Not waiting to slip into her dressing-gown, she went swiftly to a locked drawer, took out her precious shabby blotter, carried a clump of paper to the table. She sat down, bent joyfully over the paper—her pen flew. A knock on the door did not rouse her; it was repeated—louder—she looked up. She realised it was Marian seeking admittance. She closed her lips tightly, her eyes fixed themselves on the door; scarcely breathing, she waited. The door-handle was turned—"Suppose the lock was weak?"—then impatient knuckles knocked energetically on the panel. Helen did not move; she felt truly that a hundred Marians knocking would not make her open her door. A voice issued through the jamb. "Helen, dear, I am so unhappy!"

She frowned. How dared she call her "Helen"?

Another whisper. "Are you asleep already?"

Helen's eyes turned to her paper; that last sentence was weak—dip went her pen into the ink, scored it through, re-wrote it.

Outside the door there was another whisper. Helen wrote on. At half-past one she dropped her pen and looked up. Her watch lay on the table; its warning tick had been unheeded. She glanced at it now.

"How late! But I could n't leave her in that house!" She smiled and looked down at her writing. "You will wait, snug and content—there, in the country, amongst the clover and the poppies—for me now." She collected the loose sheets of paper, read them through, and shut them in her blotter. With dreaming eyes she undressed, brushed out her hair, knelt to pray. The minutes passed; she raised her head and pushed back her hair impatiently. Her brain was thronged with the characters of her story; she could not pray. She bowed her head and tried again; it was mere patter; she found herself enacting the scene where her hero should come down from town. She rose and walked up and down the room. She remembered

## A VISIT TO THE RECTORY

Mary McGregor's words, "Ay, writing fills the mind with unrighteous thoughts and leaves no room for the Lord." Was it true? She remembered how sometimes, when she was a child, she had left her bed, and shivering with cold and terror had knelt in the dark, and said her prayers all through again. Lilian had never understood: "But you've said them *once*, Helen!"

How her childish tongue had striven to explain, to make clear! That had been on the days when she had been writing a poem—a tragedy. From the tragedy to the despairing, "*Please*, Lilian, do stay awake just till I've finished my prayers. I'll tell you a whole new story to-morrow if you do!" had been a sad drop.

She went to the window and drew aside the blind. The moon had hidden behind great soft clouds; a misty fawn edged with silver showed where she hid. The silver rim spread, the moon reappeared, shone down upon her with an infinite understanding. She looked, then drew back softly, went and knelt down and prayed.

### CHAPTER XIII

#### A VISIT TO THE RECTORY

HELEN was sent one afternoon to the rectory with a message. She found Mrs. Anderson, pale, high-browed, tiredly kind, almost hidden behind piles of clothing. Her voice struck Helen as muffled; her eyes looked at her kindly from over the frocks and petticoats. "One—two—three—you won't mind waiting a moment, will you?—four—five—that's all—there should be another."

She dropped the woollen frocks she held and let her arms fall to her sides with a weary gesture. Then she came round the table to greet Helen.

Helen delivered her message.

"Yes—thank you—it is very kind of Mrs. Stanley-Browne." Mrs. Anderson's voice was absent, her eye sought the laden table.

"I wish," Helen said, "you would let me help you —"

"Oh! Well, really, it seems hardly the way to treat a visitor —" but hope gleamed in her face, animation dawned in her voice; "Miss Darcy was to have helped me, but she has not come. All those things are to be sorted and packed off before five. They're for the Missionary Society —"

"Well, I can help you already. There's the sixth frock beneath the table!"

At a quarter to five everything was "packed off." On her way back to Stanley Hall Helen met Charlotte Waring. "Spare me, Mrs. Waring," she cried, as the motor drew up. "I'm not educated up to motors yet!"

"You need n't trouble to get educated up to them now then. We look down now on the cumbersome things from the heights of air-ships. Will you come to dinner this evening?"

"Oh," Helen smiled, "a companion's time is not her own. I shall have to ask leave."

"Please come. You don't mind my asking you so informally, do you? I'll tootle up and down while you get ready. Tell Boyne to come too, will you?"

"If I can find him."

Charlotte Waring leant back against the cushions. "I should n't have thought it would be difficult," she said, with a sudden odd dryness in her voice. She added, smiling, "He's sure to be teaching his charge, you know!"

Walking up to the house Helen met him. From out her thoughts she said, "Mrs. Waring is not English, is she?"

"Yes. She does n't look it, does she? Years ago I christened her Carlotta, you know."

"She is waiting now in her motor. She wants you and me to go to dinner to-night."

"Oh, bless her. I suppose we'll have to go and ask permission. You don't seem pleased. Don't you want to go?"

"I wonder if you know what a horribly blunt way you have of asking questions?"

"Well, answer horribly bluntly, will you?"

"Yes, I want to go very much, but I hate asking for an evening out."

## A VISIT TO THE RECTORY

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He smiled at her. "I'll do that."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"Don't you know what they say — that if you never use some particular member or faculty, it shrivels and dies? Well, you are always sparing me — How about my moral courage?"

"I wish I could spare you more," he said, with an odd earnestness after her laughing words.

With judicious use of the husband's titled cousin by marriage, he gained permission for their evening out. Moreover — "She was in a motor, you said? Oh, well, I'll send along the carriage for you to-night. I'll let 'er see we've got our carriage and all, though it is only a companion and a tutor! People certainly do mix indiscriminate nowadays!"

Carlotta greeted them pleasantly.

"Oh, no, I have n't been waiting. I have been to Yavelling. One need never wait in a motor. Boyne, I wonder you did n't pawn that coat when you lost all your money."

He glanced down fondly at his fur-lined coat.

"I could n't; it suits me so beautifully. Any one else coming to-night, Carlotta?"

"The Darcys and George Austen — oh, and Sybil Mainwaring and her husband, and she will bring a man or two, I expect. Miss Alliston, it is so good of you to come like this."

"Oh, no. You don't know how glad I am to have an evening out, Mrs. Waring."

"Don't you have one once a week? Aunt Charlotte is so anxious to see you. She knew your mother when she was a girl, you know. Now, here we are."

Aunt Charlotte was a dignified old lady who took possession of Helen at once, and began to talk of bygone days. The entrance of Sybil Mainwaring, followed by her husband and another man, stopped her reminiscences.

"Oh, Mrs. Delaney, is n't Mr. Gunning here?"

"No, my dear. We had a telegram this morning. He is detained. I hope he will come down in a few days. How many men have you brought with you this evening, child?"

"Only one, and my husband, dear Mrs. Delaney."



## HELEN ALLISTON

"I don't count, you know!" Will Mainwaring's great laugh evinced a hearty content with life.

Helen smiled as she heard it.

Sybil Mainwaring turned to her presently with a little flutter of chiffon and lace.

"Oh, Miss Alliston, I think I met a sister of yours — Mrs. Fairholme? Yes? I met her down at Mrs. Rawley's place."

She chattered on gaily till dinner was announced.

After dinner Charlotte Waring took possession of Helen.

"Now," she said, "may I do away with the preliminaries? Such a lot of one's life is wasted by preliminaries! I met a woman at Monte Carlo last year; directly I saw her I wanted to get at her — she was unusual, her face had all sorts of things in it. I got introduced. I said, 'What a good season it is this year!' She said, 'Wonderful. Do you come every year?' Soon there was a pause. I looked at her helplessly. I wanted to say, 'Please don't be polite. Tell me what you *do*!' She said, 'We have had such beautiful weather lately.' And presently we were parted, and she left the next day. You see, those were preliminaries, and so we have never seen each other since. Preliminaries don't make any impression; and I should have liked to know more of her. I've been wondering all dinner-time if you were a preliminary person; but I decided to risk it. I want to get at the *you* in you;" she screwed up her deep-set eyes, and scanned Helen keenly. "I have learnt a good deal of you by staring, but that's not enough."

"It's rather an ordeal, is n't it?"

"Oh, no. My verdict is bound to be favourable; it's biased beforehand." She paused. "I don't know, though," she said slowly; "it will make me harder to please."

"What will?"

"Oh, your looks — for you to come up to your looks," she said lightly. "Now, will you tell me what you do?"

"Well, in the morning I get up at about half-past seven; breakfast is at half-past eight. I think my first duty is reading Mrs. Browne's letters to her."

## A VISIT TO THE RECTORY

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Charlotte interrupted. "Perhaps I deserved it. Only I had decided now to drop the preliminaries when I wanted to very much. However — is n't everything coming out splendidly this spring, Miss Alliston? If only we do not have any frost."

"I'm sorry. Ask me what you like."

"That's a dear. Well, do you sing?"

She sighed. "No."

"Ah, you could. Do you play?"

"A little; the usual drawing-room little."

Charlotte frowned impatiently.

"Draw?"

"No. Why should I do anything in particular? I'm a companion, you know."

"Nature meant you to do something. You are clever — and modern. I suppose you write? Ah, you do. You surely are not bashful about it? You're not so modern after all, then. I had sooner you drew. Well, now, you will tell me about it, won't you?"

Helen looked straight into the plain, clever face and smiled.

"Oh, certainly. I use a 'J' nib, broad-pointed. I prefer pink blotting-paper to white, and black ink to blue. I can't afford a type-writer, and would n't have one if I could. I've never counted how many words I write to the hour — I'm sorry — Oh, is n't that what you want? You're not a born interviewer then, Mrs. Waring. About my plots and characters — well, there's generally a hero and a heroine, judiciously disguised, of course — and one does n't call them that now. It sounds so old-fashioned, does n't it? And as a rule the hero (disguised, you know) has a pair of eyes and a nose and a mouth and legs — legs are very important, aren't they? They make or mar a man —"

"You mean you won't tell me?"

"I know I'm horrid, but there's really nothing to tell you."

"Very well. Do you think that baby-faced Sybil Mainwaring is pretty?"

"Charmingly."

"Would you think she had a care in the world?"

"No; not broadly speaking."

"Well, she has; one great carking care. Every one has. I always discover it. It is the advertisements that give people away. You watch any one take up a magazine; they'll turn to the advertisements sooner or later, and then you'll see. Sybil Mainwaring always turns at once to 'Cures for Obesity,' and becomes absorbed. She lives in terror of growing too stout."

"But why? She has such a pretty figure."

"She also has a mother, my dear, who has *not* a pretty figure. And you're young—you don't know the symptoms. At forty Sybil will be *fat*."

"Oh, don't!"

"There's that stupid George Austen. Watch him. He turns, as a duck to water, to money-making competitions, wonderful investments, and so on." She sat forward restlessly. "I wish Boyne would n't talk to that child."

Helen looked across to the lounge, where Violet Darcy sat, face up-turned, laughing and talking to Boyne, who stood leaning against a bookcase. She was surprised. "Why not?" she exclaimed.

Charlotte Waring flushed a little; she gave an odd little laugh. "Oh, it's a crank of mine. He'll turn her head."

"Is he so irresistible, then?"

"Did n't I say it was a crank of mine? We're all cranks—every one is nowadays. I've a horror of seeing a young girl plunge into something foolish—matrimony, or a colour that does n't suit her—because a man has talked to her, and she fancied things—and he—well, he did n't!"

"But she could n't plunge—into matrimony, at least—if he did n't, could she?"

"Oh, she does n't plunge with him. That's the trouble—she plunges with the other man, and he's generally stout and going bald."

"It's rather hard on the other man, is n't it?"

"My dear, who cares for the other men of this world?"

"Well, baldness and stoutness are not conducive to interest. Must they always be bald and stout?"

"Nearly always; but then they have good solid incomes, as well as solid figures."

Helen followed her eyes, which were still on Violet

## A VISIT TO THE RECTORY

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Darcy and Boyne. Her lip curled a little. "And to think I've been in a house for weeks with a lady-killer, and never knew it! Greatness thrust upon one!"

There was a little pause.

"You know Boyne Carruthers is not a lady-killer," Charlotte said then quietly; "and you are very young, or you would know that it is n't the lady-killers who are dangerous — except in books."

"If they're dangerous, they're lady-killers — only, of course, they're modern. I shall look upon Captain Carruthers with a new awe. And are not military lady-killers supposed to be specially deadly? Had I better buckle on my armour?"

There was a queer feeling of antagonism between them; it was in the atmosphere; both felt it with a quick irritation, though neither understood it.

"Perhaps you had better," Charlotte said sharply. She laughed. "You are very secure and proud, but the old truism that pride sometimes comes before a fall still holds good, you know."

"You mean," her voice was slow and calm, "I may fall in love with him?"

"It would n't be miraculous if you did."

"Oh, no; according to you, it would be miraculous if I did n't."

Suddenly Carlotta's calmness vanished; she began eagerly, feverishly, to try and justify her standpoint. "He *is* charming—it's his manners—he has such charming manners—and he is such a gentleman! That's where it is, really. Women are bound to like a gentleman—there are not too many nowadays." She paused and laughed. "Oh, you can't put it into words, but Boyne is charming."

Helen interposed: "Oh, Mrs. Waring, you will make me detest him!"

"I don't care, only you shall acknowledge I'm not quite a fool?"

"I should not think of calling you anything so rude."

Carlotta smiled. "All the same you think I'm one. After all, a crank is a fool, so it does n't matter. But if you go away thinking Boyne Carruthers is a lady-killer,

you'll be a greater one than I. For he does n't know — but you don't think it, and I'm going to speak to that pretty child."

She rose and went across the room to Violet Darcy. Helen watched her, with a little frown between her brows.

Later Carlotta sang; she sang "Beloved, it is Morn."

Her voice was a deep contralto; every note was beautiful, rounded, and rich. Boyne played her accompaniment.

Helen, listening, felt something tighten in her throat; an odd sense of compunction seized her. When the last note of the song had died away, she watched Carlotta with a queer, inexplicable anxiety. When Carlotta, rising, turned straight towards her and smiled, she experienced a quick relief, a gladness, as a child feels when it is forgiven.

Presently Carlotta came to her.

"You liked it? I'm glad. They tell me I could make my fortune as a professional. I suppose I have missed my vocation. I wish all these people would go. I'm sleepy."

Helen, seeing the shadows beneath her eyes, said gently, "Well, I am going anyway."

"I've been rude, I suppose. But I was n't reckoning you amongst the 'people.'"

"You have made up now anyway."

Driving back to Stanley Hall, Boyne asked Helen if she were tired.

"Do you know," she said unkindly, "if one is not always happily sparkling in your presence you are so astonished you think one must be tired, at least."

"Would you mind," he asked politely, "preparing me — just a little — another time?"

"It must have been rather a shock! And men can't stand shocks so well as women — not to their vanity, anyway."

He was silent.

Presently her pretty mocking voice spoke again. "Are you sulking?" it said.

"I don't think so. I think it's honest indignation I'm experiencing."

"'A rose by any other name,'" she murmured. "Oh,"

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she laughed, "is n't civilization delightful? To think that whatever I say or do, you cannot be rude back again!"

"I *could*," with dire meaning.

"Ah, but you won't. I think I'll begin."

"I thought you had begun directly we left the cottage."

"Did you? Oh, no. You don't dream of my powers of vituperation! I can be quite eloquent."

There was a pause.

"Well, I'm waiting," he observed. "I'm interested."

"My eloquence has gone. After all, it must have an interesting subject."

"*Has it gone?*" he suggested.

She settled herself down cosily into the cushions. She did not answer. The carriage rolled along, and they were silent.

"Did you and Carlotta like each other?" he asked, at last.

"I don't know. We squabbled, I think."

"Really?" his tone was disappointed. "I fancied you would like her."

She did not notice the subtle compliment conveyed unconsciously.

"She sings beautifully," she said indifferently.

He laughed shortly.

"That's enough, thanks."

"I was n't going to say any more."

He helped her out, and together they entered Stanley Hall.

Tom, yawning, distraught, was crossing the hall. He stopped. "A lot of people in there;" he nodded towards the green drawing-room. The strains of Marian's waltz floated out to them.

"Beastly dull lot," Tom laughed with a sneer; "sitting round wondering how much we're good for! One old girl — Mrs. Smythe — has promised the mater to use her box at the opera, if she'll take one. That's the kind of thing they come here for. I say, old chap," to Boyne, "come and have a game of billiards. I'm about sick of the toadies in there."

A bell rang. As Helen turned to ascend the stairs, William bore down on her.

"You're wanted in the green drawing-room, Miss."

Tom interfered. "It's a jolly shame! What can they want you for at this time of night? Don't you go, Miss Alliston."

William held the door open; Helen swept in and disappeared.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MARIAN MAKES A DISCOVERY

"A LITTLE bit of love now; it's wonderful what a lot it'll do!" Mrs. Browne was drowsy and reminiscent. "I remember the times when Mr. Browne 'ud come home that cross the children did n't dare go near 'im. 'Tea,' he'd say; 'who wants tea, I'd like to know? A woman's meal; that's what it is!' And I'd just keep quiet, and I'd send round to the fishmonger for a nice 'addick, or a bloater or two, and in a few minutes I'd be cooking it; and grad'ally the smell of it would creep over the kitchen, and Stanley (his name was Stanley, you know, my dear), well, 'e'd be sitting there, his 'ead sunk like, and his legs out straight, and presently I'd see him lift 'is head a bit and give a sniff, and then he'd pull in his legs and sit up straight. 'Don't smell bad — that,' he'd say; and I'd answer sort of casual and pleasant, 'Oh, it's just a nice 'addick for a relish. Pull your chair in, Stanley,' I'd say; 'it's just about ready.' And there, in a few minutes, we'd all be sitting round that table, as cosy as could be; and p'raps sometimes, when he'd 'ad an extra good tea, he'd lean back and light his pipe, and p'raps he'd say, 'Well, there's worse cooks than you in the world, Mary!' and that wicked young Tom would laugh and cry, 'Look at her blushing, Father!' Oh, it's wonderful what a bit of love will do!"

She sighed deeply and blinked her eyelids.

From the hall came Sara's strident voice singing a

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music-hall song very much out of tune. A change came over Mrs. Browne; she sat up, she cast a suspicious glance at Helen, "Don't you get fancying because we were poor we weren't genteel, Miss Alliston! And you'd better be going to the rect'ry about those lists of clothing Mrs. Anderson's making out for the poor 'eathen. I'm sure I'm willing to help. I can't abide to think of those poor things—cannibals as they are—living all amongst icebergs and snow with no clothes on. But what I do say is that it does seem a waste of money to buy good materials, being, as they are, sure to eat them. You might just mention what I say to Mrs. Anderson, my dear. Oh, and mind you stay and help 'er with the lists. I sha'n't want you any more this morning."

Helen found the lists finished and done with, Mrs. Anderson just going to pay a call on a sick woman, and herself free for a morning.

Five minutes before the luncheon hour Boyne waited on the south terrace. She came to him across the lawn, radiant; the brilliant sunlight caught her hair, lit her eyes. She breathed joyousness as she came.

He went to meet her, smiling.

"Well?" he said.

"Oh, such a treasure!" her breath came quickly between her joyous lips. "Am I late? Oh, I could n't help it," she laughed; "I don't feel that I care anyway."

"Tell me what you have found; don't be mean," he urged; "tell me the treasure."

"Pines," she cried; "a great pine wood!" She hurried past him, on across the green velvet of the lawn. "It was glorious." She paused a moment. "Go, the first opportunity, and drink it in—down the lane by Appleford farm, up the hill to the right—then to the left round the bend there—and up again—at the top there the scent greets you with—oh, it's beautiful!" and she was gone.

That afternoon Marian wished for a walk in Helen's company.

Helen warned her of the rough ground; and when Marian appeared in trailing skirts, a huge picture hat, and pointed-toed, high-heeled shoes, she cast an amused glance at her, and led the way to a certain rugged lane where the



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recent heavy rain had left deep holes and ruts, and had unearthed stones that lay spitefully in wait for the unwary.

Marian, hot, hobbling and dodging, with skirts bunched up, talked haltingly of what she called "Woman's Spear." When she asked Helen plaintively whether she thought she might just take her shoes off for a minute, Helen had mercy, and led the way into a field. They rested on a stile.

"My feet just smart, and I've torn my petticoat," she eyed the strip of pink silk mournfully; "and I've got the hem of the other all muddy. Madame St. Claire said you must wear at least two petticoats nowadays, and the chiffon frills are spoilt."

Toby, suddenly becoming playful, made a dart at the strip of silk, caught it, and pulled.

Marian screamed, tumbled off the stile, shouted to him to let go, besought Helen's help, with tears in her eyes.

Helen did her best.

Toby's goggle eye came round at her with inimitable impertinence; his little pug nose curled in derisive glee. There is nothing on earth more impudent than a pug's expressive countenance.

Helen laughed helplessly while she tried to get him away. Luckily Marian was so wildly engrossed in the shreds of pink chiffon and silk that began to strew the ground, that she did not discover her untimely mirth. Then Toby desisted; he sat down a few paces away and watched the repairing of the damage he had wrought. Satisfaction oozed from every pore of his body; his wheezes were an insult, they sounded like the laughter of a rude old man.

That was the climax. Marian, almost in tears, vowed she would not take another step away from home. There was a message to be left at Crowhill Farm, so Helen suggested that they should part. She further suggested that Toby should accompany Marian as her escort. After considerable pinning up—Marian provided the pins from some mysterious hiding-place—they parted. Marian accepted Toby's escort doubtfully, and only because—"Ma does n't like me to be out alone."

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Helen left her no time to change her mind, but seizing a moment when Toby's attention was engaged by a sparrow, she turned and fled. She looked back once at the thick figure plodding along, petticoats bunched up, hat crooked. She laughed; then fancying that Toby's head was turning in her direction, hurried on and out into the lane. Down the long sunny road that led to Crowhill Farm she went; she inhaled the air gladly. How good it was! How nice to be free from Marian's aggressive jockey club!

Suddenly another scent was borne to her on the breeze, — the scent of hyacinths. She stood revelling in it, then went towards the red brick wall from behind which the scent came. But it was too high for her to see over. Almost hidden by a plum-tree bursting into bloom, she found a little green gate, and looked over it. A little, trim, sweet garden met her eyes, — long beds, round beds, oval beds, and all filled with masses of hyacinths and tulips. In the middle there was a gnarled old apple-tree, weather-beaten, twisted, but hastening bravely to follow and out-blossom the plum-tree, sending out all its new little shoots of palest green. The path that led to the door was bordered with the beds of hyacinths and tulips. She stood awhile fascinated, then turned away smiling. "Oh, shade of Miss Flickers! 'My dear, it is most impolite to stare over gates.'"

She went on to Crowhill Farm and left her message, then turned back. She lingered within the scent of the hyacinths; lazily she peered down into the hedge on the opposite side, looking for primroses; she parted the tangled undergrowth in her search, and a spiteful thorn ran deep into her finger.

"Ah!" She stepped back into the road and examined the finger; she tried to extricate the thorn, but it was embedded too deeply. From behind her a voice spoke timidly, "Is it a thorn? Because if you would let me try —"

She turned. A young girl was leaning over the green gate; her face, fair and round and fresh, peeped forth from the blossom of the plum-tree; a stray petal or two lay on her pretty, light brown hair. Her cheeks were flushing shyly. "If you would let me try —"

"Thank you. Yes, it is a thorn, but —"

"If you would come in — a needle —" she held open the green gate.

"Really, I don't think I need trouble you; it will be all right."

The face above the white collar grew solemn.

"Oh, please come in! There was a lady once — mother knew her — and she ran a thorn into her finger just as you have done, and she neglected it, and — she had to have her finger cut off!"

"Oh, then," Helen's eyes twinkled, "I will come in; thanks."

She followed her little hostess up the sunny, blossom-swept path, between the rows of hyacinths and tulips.

"How lovely it is!" she exclaimed involuntarily.

The girl looked round with a shy pleased surprise.

"Do you like it? I do all this bit of gardening myself. Mother thinks they're not worth the time and trouble I spend over them. Will you come in here, please?"

She led her into a chilly, dark little room fragrant with bowls and vases of hyacinths and tulips and daffodils. The scent greeted her on the threshold; the flowers went a long way towards hiding that fatal air of "best parlour" that hung about the room.

"I will fetch a needle," the girl said; "please sit down."

She came back presently, followed by a little pippin-like woman, who was obviously her mother.

"I'll get it out for you, Miss," she said briskly; "I'm a real good hand at getting thorns out. Gracie, there, got one into her bit of a finger before she was two years old."

Helen held out her hand with a smile, "I am lucky to get a professional!"

Mrs. Kemp took her hand into a kindly grasp and extracted the thorn. Helen thanked her, and prepared to go, but Mrs. Kemp interposed. "Gracie, go and fetch Miss Alliston a glass of milk!"

"Now, Gracie, there," she observed while the milk was being fetched, "she's that soft-hearted — she fetched me to take the thorn out, because she was afraid she might hurt you. But she can churn and milk and look after the fowls — she loves all the work about a farm, though you

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would n't think it to look at her. She can do twice as much as great girls twice her size get through!"

Helen thought that Grace bringing her glass of milk made a charming picture. Hurrying towards Stanley Hall she mused — "Well, 'more people know Tom Fool.' I have n't the least idea who those people are."

At dinner that evening she asked Mrs. Browne if she knew them; she asked it with a sparkle of mischief in her eye, which the reply justified.

"Farm people, Miss Alliston? I'm sure I don't know anything about any farm people. Very likely they supply us with our milk."

Tom's voice, loud and defiant, struck in.

"I know them, Miss Alliston. They're the people who were so kind to me when I got chucked out of the gig that time. They're a jolly sight better than most of the old frumps about here!"

Tom's face was red, his eyes angry. Marian glanced across at him, a gleam of interest lighting her face.

"Are — how many of them are there, Tom dear?"

"Father and mother and — er — a daughter," muttered Tom.

Helen felt a great thankfulness to Mrs. Smythe for having asked Sara to dine with her that evening.

At the word "daughter" Mrs. Browne's shocked silence broke into voluble speech.

"Oh, you must have your fun, Tom! Fancy speaking of common farm people like that! Ha! ha! ha!" her laugh was almost hysterical; "how you do love your joke, to be sure! You're a bad boy; always up to some fun or other."

"It isn't fun," muttered Tom sulkily, but his momentary excitement seemed to have subsided; he sat in gloomy silence.

After dinner he approached Helen, where she sat looking through a new novel to see "if it ended happy" and was all about "titled folk and genteel society."

Mrs. Browne had yawned through the reading of two fashionable books on slum life, and then had returned to her "genteel" novels.

At a table Boyne sat playing "halma" with her; his courteous interest never wavered, though his opponent's play was decidedly erratic.

## HELEN ALLISTON

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Helen was exempt to-night. There were evenings when they played "round games," and all were expected to join, and Sara generally lost and flew into a temper. Helen knew that Boyne suggested "halma" to save her from having to join in some game. And she knew, too, that he loathed games.

"Er — had a nice walk this afternoon, Miss Alliston?" Tom inquired in a casual sort of voice.

Smiling at the memory of Marian, she responded, "Very, thanks."

Tom bent and pulled Toby's tail. Toby snapped at him and went to sleep again.

"Pretty, all about Woodleigh, is n't it?" his tone was more casual than before.

"Oh, very."

"Er — that farm you were talking about — er — what's their name? Kemp — that's it — jolly hyacinths they've got — Here, Toby, my foot's not a pillow, old chap!"

She fluttered the pages of her book suggestively, but Tom went on.

"Did you see — er — Mrs. Kemp, Miss Alliston?"

"I told you she took the thorn out."

"Oh, yes, of course. Let me see, you saw — er — Miss Kemp too, did n't you?"

"Yes."

"Er — nice little girl, is n't she?"

She glanced at his fiery face.

"She was most kind," she said coldly.

"Oh, they're kind people!" he responded eagerly; "there's no mistake about that! And — er —" he bent and poked Toby's side, "er — she's pretty, is n't she? I don't say she's your style of beauty — here, stow it, Toby! — but — er — she's a pretty little girl, now, is n't she?"

"She is very pretty;" she raised her book and deliberately began to read.

From the table came a maternal call, "Tom, dear, come here a bit, will you? I want you to 'elp me — that naughty Captng Carruthers is just beating me nohow!"

A few days later Mrs. Browne desired Helen to write invitations for a dinner-party.

## MARIAN MAKES A DISCOVERY

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"You know what to say, my dear. I know you put R. S. T. U. V., or something, down in the corner. Just a dinner, and p'raps a bit of a dance after."

Helen prodded the blotting-paper with her nib.

"Don't you think," she suggested gently, "it would be better not to ask Lady Dungay?"

"Not ask 'er Ladyship! Why, good heavens, I want her more than any of them!"

"But she has n't called, you see."

"Oh, that don't matter, bless you! There's lots of people would n't trouble to call just for nothing like, in the afternoon, who'd jump quick enough at a good dinner. We ain't stiff nowadays, you know, my dear."

So Helen penned the invitations.

As she wrote the last one she heard the sound of hoofs, and looking up, saw Boyne and Tom cantering past the windows. Boyne looked in and waved his hat. She watched them down the drive. The difference between the two men made her smile.

"That tutor's a lucky man. Tom refused to do 'is lessons this morning," Mrs. Stanley-Browne observed. "Don't he look nice on horseback, my dear?"

Her eyes were on Tom. Helen's were on Boyne as she answered, "Splendid!" in such an earnest voice that Mrs. Browne glanced at her uneasily.

At the first opportunity Helen hurried to her room. "I *must* find time to mend that lace collar for this evening, and I will wear my grey."

She snatched every minute that day for working on the collar, and came down late to dinner in a misty grey gown of some soft clinging stuff, adorned triumphantly with the large old lace collar.

Boyne came to her later. "I think I like the grey edition better than any," he said softly.

"Do you? I like the white and gold."

"I'd love to see it."

"Oh, it's a rare edition; it is kept very carefully, and only brought out on very rare occasions. It's not a cyclopædia for daily use. It only has information upon beautiful, frivolous subjects, such as flowers—masses of glorious flowers—and scents—and dances—and ices."

"The cover, Miss Alliston, should make no difference to what is within."

"Dictionaries, Captain Carruthers, are apt to be sententious."

"Well, won't you let the poor old Dictionary see that beautiful, frivolous Cyclopædia?"

"Perhaps, on the day of 'the dinner with a bit of a dance afterwards.'"

"How many dances will you give me?"

She laughed. "It's three weeks ahead — that bit of a dance. And, for all I know, the lady companion may not be allowed to dance at all. Or perhaps she has to lead out all the stout old gentlemen whom no one else will have."

"If that's all, I can requisition a pillow."

Later that evening Tom had an outbreak. He approached Helen and Marian, and burst out, "I reckon I'm about sick of all this pretending we're so high-and-mighty."

"Oh, Tom!" Marian was aghast. "Oh, Miss Alliston, don't notice him! Oh, Tom, dear —"

"Bless you," he went on with a short laugh, "Miss Alliston knows all about it! She's the real article and we're not. It's all rot trying to get in with people who only put up with you for your money! Give me good, honest folk, who like you for yourself!" And Tom turned on his heel and marched out of the room.

There were tears in Marian's eyes; she looked at Helen in terror.

"Oh, poor Tom! Oh, he's so high-spirited and sensitive! Oh, do sit forward so Sarra can't see me, Miss Alliston!"

That night she paid Helen a visit in her bedroom. Helen did not want to write just then, so prepared herself to enjoy her.

Marian made a dramatic entrance, casting glances around her, and demanding in a loud whisper if they were alone.

Helen suggested that she might look in the wardrobe and beneath the bed to make sure.

Marian prepared to do so. In the flickering light of the candle she carried her countenance shone, absorbed, earnest. The weird shadow she cast on the walls enthralled Helen.

## MARIAN MAKES A DISCOVERY

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"Oh, for the pencil of a ready drawer!" she murmured.

Marian, her inspection finished, sat down, and observing that what she had to confide was very private, made Helen promise and vow never to "tell." Then she proceeded with her confidence. It appeared that, disturbed and anxious, she had sought Tom in his room that night, and Tom had been gazing at a photograph, and had hastily pushed it into his pocket-book, and the pocket-book into his waistcoat pocket — "next to his heart, you see," with a sentimental sigh.

Round this theme Marian wandered pathetically. "We are a romantic family — it runs in our blood. Tom is in love!"

She was very funny. Helen's cold-blooded suggestion that perhaps the photograph had been hers or her mother's brought down the expressions of disgust, scorn, pity, that Helen had been angling for.

"I know! You're different; but once you've been through it, there's no mistaking it."

Before taking her departure she informed Helen that they had discovered that she was an author, and offered her services in the love scenes.

Then she rose with a yawn; but still she hesitated; she went to the door, looked back. "I —" she looked vastly uncomfortable, "I think if I were you — I mean servants are so inquisitive about letters, and — and that sort of thing —" her face was a deep red, "I — I'd lock them up."

Helen, with a sudden angry intuition, understood.

"I — oh," Marian faltered, "it's not me! I mean — servants —"

"I know," Helen said gently; "thanks for warning me. I will lock my letters away more carefully."

"Servants are so inquisitive!"

"I know they are."

Marian gave a sigh of relief, and departed.

Helen went to a drawer and took out a letter; she held it to her nose, then flung it down — "Servants don't drench themselves with opopanax!"



CHAPTER XV

A DAY AT HOLLINGSTONE

THE sound of the wheels died away into the distance. Toby stopped barking after the departing carriage, and waddled back up the drive.

They looked at each other. "A whole afternoon," she breathed.

He nodded. "What shall we do with it?"

She pondered.

"I don't know. Suggest something that will not have the remotest flavour of — this —" she waved an expressive hand — "about it."

"Something really new? Well, the pines?" he said.

She looked at him gravely.

"You mean something like

"Ever charming, ever new,  
When will the 'pine-scape' tire the view?"

No, I want something else to-day." She paused a moment. "Seriously, imagine a pine-scape — great stretches of pines and pines and pines, rising behind each other! Oh, the scent of it!"

He sighed resignedly. "We may as well sit down now."

"Why? Oh," comprehension lit her eyes; she laughed. "The end," she said; "now suggest somewhere to go."

"Will you do what I tell you? Then go and put on your things — bring something warm — for we shall not be back before evening."

She went to the door, looked back at him with the warmth of glad anticipation in her eyes. He smiled at her. She paused. "Toby!" she said. She looked down at the artful little pug pressed determinedly into her skirt. "He knows!"

"Well, we sha'n't be here to be disturbed by his howls," Boyne observed with equanimity.

"No, Toby, not now; go back!" she ordered; but Toby pressed his fat side the closer, and wheezed patheti-

## A DAY AT HOLLINGSTONE

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cally. "I know he's a little beast," she said, with an apologetic note in her voice, "but I do wish he didn't know we are going — you know — I dare n't say the fatal word."

Boyne took a stride across the room, picked up Toby, and deposited him behind a lounge.

"Be quick," he said; "he'll be out again in a minute."

"No; let's settle him down with a biscuit."

At the word "biscuit" a goggle eye emerged from the hangings of the lounge, and peered knowingly up at Helen.

"He really is cute," she said, going across to his biscuit box.

Boyne took out his watch. "Perhaps you'd rather spend your afternoon with the dear little dog, Miss Alliston?" he suggested blandly.

She laughed. "You are every bit as bad-tempered as Toby."

Toby was barking lustily for his biscuit. She gave it to him, settled him down on his scarlet cushion, and left him.

They set out presently for the station.

"I'm going to take you to Hollingstone," he said; "if we hurry we can catch the 2.40. Do you mind hurrying?"

"Oh, no. Tell me about Hollingstone."

"Well, it's primitive. We shall have to ask the guard to stop there — beforehand — if we want to get out there."

"That sounds promising."

They were at the foot of a hill; as they started to climb it, two bicycles came whizzing down, side by side, at a frantic pace.

They paused and watched.

At the foot Violet Darcy jumped off. "You didn't beat me, Max! Did he, Captain Carruthers?"

"It was a dead heat," Boyne said.

Violet turned up her nose at the brown-faced young fellow with her.

"That hill has a notice marked, 'Dangerous to cyclists,'" observed Helen.

Violet laughed.

"Some old woman of the law put it up; it's glorious to skim down like that. We're running away — Max

and I — Miss Alliston. Oh, you don't know Max, do you? He's Max Gunning. I've bullied him ever since I was born, except when he has bullied me."

"Is n't she an awful chatterbox, Miss Alliston?" put in the big young fellow, with an affectionate glance at the chatterbox; "and I'm sure you are in a hurry."

"We are catching the 2.40," Boyne observed.

"Oh, I say — awfully sorry — come on, Vi. How about our bikes? Could n't you spin along on them? And leave 'em at the station?"

"Do!" Violet cried after their retreating forms.

Helen looked back smiling. "We shall catch it all right," she said.

Max said something to Violet; she nodded, and the next minute he spun past them up the hill.

Violet turned her bicycle and walked along with them.

"It's all right," she said; "Max has gone on to stop the train."

"Oh," Helen laughed, "is he so all-powerful?"

"The station-master's a very crusty old man, you know, Miss Darcy," put in Boyne smiling.

"Oh, not to Max. No one's ever crusty to him."

Boyne's step had slackened. Helen glanced at him.

"We had better hurry, anyway, had n't we?"

"Not at all," firmly.

"But —"

"If that young fellow has been kind enough to tell our train to wait, I'm not going to spoil it by hurrying, Miss Alliston."

"You think I mind hurrying?"

"I should n't think racing up a hill on a dusty day is the most lovely thing in the world, especially when," with a glance at Violet, "we have been smothered once already in clouds from cyclists."

"Oh," Violet burst out laughing, "you ungrateful creature! If it were n't for Max and me, where would you be?"

"In our train," Boyne said promptly, and they all laughed.

Max awaited them on the platform, and the train and the crusty station-master awaited them too.

"Come on, Miss Alliston," the young fellow cried, open-

## A DAY AT HOLLINGSTONE

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ing the door of a first-class compartment; "I hope you have n't hurried?"

"We came up that hill at our most leisurely ease, Mr. Gunning, thanks to you."

He laughed out boyishly. "It was thanks to me, too, that you nearly lost your train, was n't it?" He thrust his hand through the window and gripped hers heartily. "Good-bye, Miss Alliston;" he nodded to Boyne, and stood back.

"It's our 'at home' day," called Violet through the window; "that's what we're running away from!"

"She's running away, and I'm escorting her," amended Max.

"Mr. Gunning, take her back at once!" The train moved out of the station. "I'm sure you mean to take her home this minute," Helen called from the window. She laughed at their expressive faces, though she could not hear their response, and sat down.

"Is n't he a nice boy?" she said to Boyne.

"Yes. I've met an old Gunning somewhere — an uncle of his, I fancy."

When the train stopped at Hollingstone she looked out interestedly. She saw a queer little platform, very narrow, with a beautiful background, green and sweet, sloping up to meet the blue sky. The polite guard came to open their carriage door; they were the only passengers who alighted.

"I feel like royalty," she said. "Is n't there a ticket place? And where is the entrance?"

They walked down the platform; a woman in a white apron came forward for their tickets. They crossed the railway lines and went through a little white gate into the road beyond.

"Oh," Helen said, "Thorpe was Philistia beside this!"

"Shall it be cowslips or primroses first?" he asked.

She considered. "I love them all — whichever comes."

"The cowslips are at the foot of the downs."

They looked across the fields — rich brown earth and green grass — to the misty downs in the distance.

"I know where I'll take you first," he said; "I found it the other day."

She resigned herself to him with the comradeship he found so charming. They started up a long, narrow, rugged-grounded lane; their progress was slow. Helen stopped to find treasures in the long grass and up the banks on either side. All along the banks were studded with great clumps of little white stitchwort, delicate, clear-eyed. Once she found a violet, and captured it joyously, whereat Boyne smiled.

"Oh," she said, "I wish I could paint — the rough, red-brown ground — the hedges with the new greens peeping out amongst the old last year's yellows and browns — the sky — the downs." She sighed. "Why can't I do it?"

"Be thankful you know you can't, Miss Alliston."

She pursed up her lips. "Yes, Mr. Dictionary. I can hear sheep," she added.

"They're in the field at the end here."

They looked over the fence. The sheep grazed peacefully; frisky little lambs grazed, too, or pretended to graze, in comical imitation of their elders. There was a beautiful light over it all; it looked so still and peaceful that it seemed unreal. One stately ram reared a foolish head and eyed them with white hauteur.

"I've something else for you," Boyne said, moving away.

She followed him.

"Can I *touch* it?"

"Yes."

"Be quick, then."

The next moment she was stooping to pick some stray primroses.

"I wish you'd come," he urged.

Regretfully she went with him, across the field, down a difficult little lumpy opening, with brambles stretching out spiteful hands on either side, and into a sort of tiny wood. She drew a long breath.

The ground was carpeted with brown bracken, and amongst it primroses gleamed; great patches of violets smiled shyly up at her. She looked around — on all sides she saw them; she dared not move forward for fear of crushing them. Joyously she smiled at him.

"You have done splendidly!" she cried. She crept in

## A DAY AT HOLLINGSTONE

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amongst them, knelt and began plucking; a blue sky twinkled down between the branches of the trees. "Oh," she said simply, "how happy I am!"

He shut back some words behind a firmly closed mouth; he watched her as she picked the violets and primroses.

"Lovely long stems, too," she murmured; "*how* greedy I feel!"

They stayed there a long while. The basket Boyne carried overflowed with primroses and violets nestling in their cool leaves, and still Helen could not drag herself away. His suggestion of cowslips drew her forth at last. At the opening into the field she paused and looked back.

"I am sorry to leave it," she said.

The primroses shone palely, the violets nestled in clumps; the dead bracken rustled protectingly about them, sheltering them from the breeze that danced through the delicate boughs of the trees; the blue sky, flecked now with great, soft, white clouds, smiled down on them. "They don't mind," Helen said, and she looked half-guiltily at the laden basket; "and you could not tell that any had gone!"

"But the sorrowing mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters can tell," Boyne said.

She laughed hard-heartedly.

"I don't care! Nothing could make me care to-day. It's that sort of day, is n't it?"

"Yes," he said.

"Oh," she buried her face in the primroses, "the sweetness of them! The honey-sweet scent of them!"

They went on to the downs and found the cowslips. When the basket would not hold another one Helen stood erect.

She looked out over the yellow field, then turned to him. "I feel so good," she said, "don't you?"

"If Providence would always give me the present conditions I'd always be good."

"It's easier to be good in the country than in town. Flowers and all the other beautiful things are so peaceful — they make one feel so good;" she sighed, "ah, well —"

"Don't!" he interposed.

She laughed. "No, I won't."

They wandered on. They passed a rambling farm, with sheds and out-houses set down with apparent aimlessness, as a child builds with bricks. They looked over a wall and saw a scene oddly like a picture, — two calves, a brown and a white, fed from a trough, together with a group of hens, and a brood of fluffy chickens. It made a charming picture.

Helen looked in silence. Her eyes showed far-back thoughts.

"Tell me what you are thinking of?" he said.

She sighed.

"A day — sunny like this, but cold — and a little brown calf one side of a wall, and a long-legged quivering atom of humanity on the other;" she paused. "I spent two hours trying to get that calf to come close — so that I could touch him. He did come close — *almost* close enough. Oh, how I stretched out my arm — my fingers! I can feel now the beautiful warmth of his thick coat as it came to my finger-tips — the *softness* of it that I so *almost* could reach —" she stopped.

"Two hours!" he said.

"You see, my grandfather would have nothing — no animal or bird of any sort — about the place. We hardly ever came in contact with any young thing. Our stiff, strictly health-walks, with Mary McGregor, did n't include them. We had passed that calf that day. I slipped out alone, and ran to it —"

"Were you punished?"

"Oh, yes. Bed, and bread and water. I didn't care. I was one ache of disappointment from head to foot." She laughed. "Oh, *how* I ached — really — when they pulled me away from that wall! I had been leaning over — toes clinging in a crevice — bent over that wall for two hours. I was *glad* I ached! Oh, I was a bad-tempered little horror, was n't I?"

"Awful," he said. He smiled at her gently. "Poor little soul," he murmured. "Anyway," he added firmly, "you shall stroke one of these calves."

"Oh," she laughed, "the recklessness! Evidently you have never hung over a wall for two hours trying to entice one to come near."

## A DAY AT HOLLINGSTONE

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"I'll do it now, if necessary."

"Well, begin."

She watched his efforts with laughing eyes. He picked grass and held it forth. The calves had left the trough; they eyed him with calm innocence, standing close together, sweet and serene.

He used all the blandishments he could think of, and still they stood and serenely eyed him.

"Are n't you rather tired?" she suggested kindly.

"Not in the least, thank you. Are you?"

"Oh, I? No, I'm waiting to stroke a calf, you know."

He won at last. The little brown calf left his brother, and slowly, shyly, step by step, drew near the wall.

Helen, in her eagerness, forgot her amusement, and aided and abetted his efforts. She gave the calf one gentle stroke, and then some noise about the farm startled him, and he frisked away.

"Idiotic things — calves!" Boyne ejaculated angrily.

"Sacrilege! They're delicious. And," consolingly, "I did stroke him. And," with a swift smile, "there's some beautiful blackthorn up that road — we'll go and look at it."

They found a little copse, and stood gazing.

"I'm hungry," Boyne said. His eyes sought a cottage standing, red and trim, in a little garden with a gravel path bordered with wall flowers and white shells. "I feel like hot toast and creases," he said sentimentally.

She cried out, "The banality of you!"

"Well, may I go and eat while you satisfy body and soul with that copse?"

"I think I will come too. You would hurry and give yourself indigestion if you thought I was waiting for you," she said demurely.

"Pardon, I never have indigestion."

"You've never had me waiting for you."

He looked at her with deep content.

"No, that's true."

"It should be against all your instincts to keep me waiting."

"It is."

"Then —"

"Oh, I knew you would come. You forget I'm a Classi-



cal Dictionary. I could give you instance upon instance of goddesses —”

“Who could n’t resist hot toast and — what was it? —”

“Creases. Have n’t you ever heard of creases as a relish with your tea? Oh, Cyclopædia! ‘Rules pertaining to the meal called Tea. No. 1. Always see that your guests are supplied with a relish for tea. It is exceedingly bad form, and very inhospitable to furnish mere bread and butter, and tea. Creases make a beautiful relish, and have the merit of being cheap, and procurable at all times of the year. Water cress is perhaps the best crease, but, when this is not obtainable, grass, having just as much flavour, makes a good substitute.’”

“‘Rules pertaining to the man called Amusing. No. 1. If a man chatter nonsense, it is a sure sign of an empty and frivolous head. He must be kept at a distance. To do this gracefully requires much tact and care. Nothing is worse form than to dismiss him abruptly. Let him talk, but do not encourage his talk. Listen with an absent and chilly eye —’”

He broke in there. “Your eye is never absent and chilly. It’s by far the most interested eye I’ve ever come across.”

“Vanity makes you see an interest in it that is n’t there.”

“May be. I’m grateful to my vanity then, but I did n’t say it was specially interested in *my* talk —” he laughed. “Don’t you loathe an absent eye?” he turned towards a gate.

“Oh, not that cottage. Is n’t it too respectable to ask for a meal at? Look at its tied back curtains!”

“I don’t ask. I say ingratiatingly, ‘Can you tell me where I can get some tea?’ It always comes off.”

“What a hypocrite you are!”

It came off as he had predicted.

Seated at the table in the parlour, waiting for their tea, Helen eyed him respectfully. “I bow to your powers of fascination at last,” she said; “I never dreamed you would overcome our hostess’s long upper lip.”

“It is rather terrific, is n’t it? But I refused to let it daunt me.”

She stood their basket of primroses and violets and cowslips in the middle of the table.

"Don't you feel that that is enough?"

"Not in the least," he answered firmly. "I hope she will bring us a relish, don't you?"

"How can I say 'yes,' with those primroses eyeing me?"

He stretched out his hand. "I'll put them under the table —"

She stopped him, laughing.

"No, no! I will not let them interfere with my material appetite. After all, if one has an imagination one can convert even a relish into a poem."

"It does n't need an imagination. I hear the sweet jingle of approaching cups and saucers."

The woman brought in the tea-tray, a plate of ham, a plate of hot cakes, and new bread and butter, and arranged them all with a solemn upper lip. Then from the door she looked back, her lip relaxed. "Eat a good tea, Miss," she said, "and if there's anything more you'd like, please call. If only you'd come the day before yesterday, now! We finished the last bit of the apple and black currant preserve Aunt Mary had to her funeral, yesterday!"

"It's your fascinations, not mine," Boyne observed when she had gone; "are you not glad the funeral meats were finished yesterday? May I offer you some ham, Miss Alliston?"

"Oh, really, Captain Carruthers, well — just a morsel then —"

Once, towards the end of the meal, she said, "I must — just for a moment — What would Mrs. Not-to-be-mentioned say to this plebeian repast?"

He eyed her blankly. "Have I met the lady?"

"High tea! Oh, you can't crush me. I'm specially prepared — I'm uncrushable. If I want to talk on forbidden subjects, I shall. Poor old soul, how she would long to join us, and how she would pretend she did n't."

He pushed his plate from him.

"You have taken away my appetite! You talk calmly of her joining us. I can eat no more."

They walked back to Stanley Hall. It was a beautiful walk. Once they rested on a stile to watch the sunset. The ineffable stillness of evening was about them; the stillness that is like none other in the world; the stillness so

full of sounds that never break it — the sounds that come only with evening, and the scents that come with it too. It was all very beautiful and good. It seemed a pity to talk. Beauty and goodness seemed borne to them on the stillness, midst the fragrance of the grass, the bracken, the hedges. Boyne looking at her, caught his breath. It seemed to him that the whole meaning of the evening, the whole of its tender beauty, was there, in her face. He knew, as she sat silent, that she was part of it all. The sun drifted, behind fleecy clouds, towards the west. Through the clouds he shone, pale gold, filmy. The deep blue of the serene sky was flecked here and there with baby clouds, ranges of them, like delicate shells, pinky white against the blue. Birds' voices twittered; a blackbird called in the hedge. Over the grass the shadows lengthened and deepened, creeping softly towards them.

She spoke in a low voice. "When the sun goes behind that great white cloud, we will go."

He went slowly, emerging in full glory of gold for a moment, and then sinking behind the cloud.

She rose. "We must go." She gave a little laugh. "It seems rude to turn our backs on him, does n't it?"

"Well, don't. Let us wait."

She shook her head.

"We are late already. It would be spoilt by the echo of that 'Miss Alliston! Miss Alliston!' We must hurry."

In the drive at Stanley Hall she turned to him. "I have enjoyed it so —"

"It's so good of you —" he began.

From the hall came that cry, "Miss Alliston! Miss Alliston!"

"*Damn!*" Boyne muttered; he added swiftly, "It is damp, is n't it?"

"Not a bit!" she laughed as she sped into the hall.

"You've got no business to be out so late, Miss Alliston! Come in 'ere — there's a letter I wanted to ask you about."

Helen followed her into the blue drawing-room. Toby flew from beneath a chair, barking. Sara turned on her.

"Jolly cheek I call it! Staying out to all hours like that! And with Captain Carruthers too! If I was the Mater I would n't stand it!"

## A DAY AT HOLLINGSTONE

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Helen stood, tall, calm; a terrible sick loathing of it all upon her. "But you are not Mrs. Stanley-Browne," she said coldly.

"Oh, Sarra!" Marian rose from her chair, stumbled over her skirt, and plucked nervously at her sister's sleeve; "oh, Sarra, dear!"

Sara shook her head off. "Leave me be, Marrian! D' you think I'm going to be lorded over with her hoighty-toighty ways! Her gadding about with him! It's not respectable! I —"

Helen turned determinedly to Mrs. Stanley-Browne; her voice was clear and cold; it was to be heard even with Sara's rasping, excited tones rising higher and higher every minute.

"Mrs. Stanley-Browne, if you cannot stop her, I will not stay here."

"Oh, Sarra, my love! There, there, you'll make yourself ill."

Helen looked round the brilliantly lit glaring room; at Sara, with her low, red face, and storming tongue; at Marian, tearful and scared; at Mrs. Browne, red and almost weeping, and lastly at Toby, his head raised, barking to add his quota to the din. She shuddered, and turned to the door. "I shall go to-morrow!" she said.

"Oh, Sarra, and you know you wanted her to tell you about what dresses you'd need for the season!" wailed Marian.

Mrs. Browne trotted agitatedly across the room, and planted herself in front of Helen, before the door.

"Out of this room you don't go, unless it's over my body! And no offence meant!"

She looked so comical standing there,—such a broad little homely figure in her trailing satin gown,—there was such an incongruous air of tragedy about her, that Helen's disgust was lightened suddenly with an impulse towards laughter.

Sara's voice had ceased abruptly. She had recognised her need of being wary, if she wished to have Helen's advice about her frocks.

"Now, my dears, make it up! What's a few words, more or less? Young folk will be young folk. There's faults on both sides—" Mrs. Browne paused for breath.

Helen spoke slowly. "I cannot stay, Mrs. Stanley-

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Browne, unless you will undertake that Miss Stanley-Browne never speaks to me again as she has this evening. I will take orders or reprimands from no one but you."

"That's only fair, Ma dear," put in Marian; "you're her mistress."

"Very well, my dear, I'm sure Sarra will leave things to me if I ask her to."

"Oh, all right. What a fuss about nothing! I'm sure I don't care how she car—"

"Yes, yes, my love! There, that's all right then. There, Miss Alliston, now go up and take off your things. Never mind about my letter, my dear."

Helen went wearily up the stairs. At the top of the flight a door opened noisily, and Tom came out into the corridor. His face was gloomy, and its sudden honest beam when he caught sight of her, made her feel quite fond of him.

"You look done up, Miss Alliston! I say, why don't you have your dinner sent up to you, and don't appear again to-night? Sarah's in a beastly temper—"

"Oh, no, thank you."

"I would if I were you."

She shook her head, smiling.

"It's nice of you to suggest it," she said gently.

Tom grew scarlet, his large ears stood out like danger signals.

"Oh, no—oh, I say.—" and he turned and blundered noisily down the stairs.

"Poor Tom, he is n't bad, after all." She went up to her room, smiling.

## CHAPTER XVI

### "A SLIGHT DIFFICULTY"

TOM developed a love for an out-door life. He was away from Stanley Hall between every classical lesson, and sometimes when a lesson was due. He also developed an intense bitterness for the "aristocracy," and professed himself a Radical. Whereat his mother

wept, and Sara scoffed. At every meal there were bickerings. In Stanley Hall there was no peace.

They were invited to a large and indiscriminate "at home" that the Darcys gave every spring, to get all the minor people off their hands at once.

It was a lovely warm spring afternoon, and most of the guests wandered into the garden. Mr. Anderson escorted Helen down some by-paths to a green-house, in which he desired to show her a certain orchid.

She admired duly, looked round the garden, and wished he would leave her there amongst the hyacinths. Providence answered her wish; a voluble lady in violet pounced on the Rector, and in a rush of Mothers' Meetings, Choral Societies, and Missionary Work, dragged him away.

Helen, delighted, wandered down the path, sweet with the scent of the hyacinths. She saw presently that her way was blocked by the portly figure of Sir George Blankett, on a seat. She paused; from overhead came a cautious whisper:

"Miss Alliston!"

It came from the summer-house. Helen looked towards it. Peeping down at her from its roof was Violet Darcy's mischievous face.

"Come round here," she whispered; "quick, before that old gossipmonger sees you!"

Helen went round to the other side of the summer-house.

"Good afternoon, Miss Alliston. Sorry we've eaten up our store of cakes, or we'd ask you to join us."

It was Max Gunning who spoke, throned on top of the summer-house.

She laughed. "So this is how you help entertain your guests, Miss Darcy!"

"We're in a slight difficulty," Max observed; "and I'm quite sure you'll long to help us out?"

"Am I to catch you when you jump, or what?"

"I'm afraid my fairy weight might sprain your arm. It's poor old Vi, though,—she'll get into a beastly bother—"

"You see," interrupted Violet, "we can't get down this side. Did you ever see such an absurdly high summer-house? We climbed up the other side—by the window—

ledges. We've been sitting up here, behind this bit of trimming — no one can see us from below when we get behind here."

"Suggest something, Miss Alliston," urged Max; "I'm sure you're a suggesty sort of person."

"A ladder?"

"Too public, I'm afraid."

"Unless it were a Jacob's ladder."

"I may be missed any minute," Violet said, "and that mean old Wet Blankett's glued to that seat, apparently, and if he sees us get down —!" She ended with a musical and very expressive whistle.

"You want me to *unglue* him, I suppose," Helen observed.

"That's it. If you don't mind," she added.

"Oh, I don't mind, but I don't know quite *how* to unglue him. Never mind, I'll lure him away somehow."

"Put some salt on his coat-tails, Miss Alliston," called Max after her.

She held out her empty hands, and shook her head.

"Never mind," Violet said; "'fortune favours the brave,' you know."

"'The fair,' you mean, Vi."

"You have n't a few cake crumbs left for me to strew the ground with?" Helen said, and laughing, walked down the path towards Sir George Blankett.

"Can you direct me to the green-houses?" she asked, stopping beside him. Sir George struggled to his feet; he was very portly, and he had lunched well. He raised his hat and smiled. Helen had carefully turned her back on the perfectly obvious green-houses.

"Why, certainly, they are just there — over to the right," he said.

She looked to the left with a puzzled little frown. In passing, she swept the summer-house with her gaze, and saw the top of a big straw hat peeping over the "trimmings." She bit her lip, and walked on a few steps, with a "thank you" to Sir George. She went the right way, and she went very slowly, enjoying the desperation that she knew must be seizing on the two on the summer-house. Then she took a wrong turning, and hesitating, looked

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back anxiously at Sir George, who was standing, watching her.

"To the right," he said, his slumbrous gaze hovering with divided allegiance betwixt her and the seat.

Back she came.

"Did you say there was a short cut anywhere?"

The seat suddenly appeared uninviting and without attraction of any sort.

"May I escort you?" he asked gallantly, and the next minute she walked staidly past the summer-house, accompanied by the Wet Blankett. A whispered "Bravo!" floated down to her, but luckily Sir George was rather deaf.

Later on a demure Violet joined her in the drawing-room.

"Thanks, awfully," she said. "You know, the mother would have been awfully wild if that old Blankett had gone about telling every one I climbed on to the tops of summer-houses to entertain our guests. You see, I'm supposed to be grown up now — that's why she'd be so cross. Do have some more tea." She took a chocolate biscuit herself. "I like school-room teas best," she rattled on. "Max says you're a brick! He does like you. Max is awfully jolly about me having to wear trains and things, and go and bob before the Queen, and all that. He's frightfully sorry for me," she spread out a slim brown hand; "Rosamund says it's a disgrace," she sighed, "and as for my freckles! I've only got a few on the bridge of my nose, after all! Max says he likes them."

Helen scented a compliment with a feeling of surprise.

"He says they're like birds' eggs. But I'm to be greased like a mummy and wear a veil and gloves. Last night Rosamund came into my room, and waited till Lawson had put some horrid white grease all over my face. I call it dirty, myself. I got out of bed directly they'd gone, and scrubbed it all off. I simply could n't sleep with sticky stuff all over my face. Don't you think it's better to leave a person's complexion as nature made it?"

"I don't think yours needs artificial aids yet," Helen laughed.



Violet nodded.

"I was meant to be a farm-girl, or something of that sort, if I could n't be a boy, that is. My very name — Violet!" She burst out laughing.

"It's a pretty name — the modest, retiring violet, you know."

"Yes, I know. You're being beastly sarcastic, only I don't mind a bit."

She was silent. Helen said consolingly:

"It's only a few months in town, after all, you know."

Violet looked at her with a petulant frown.

"But it's not done with after the few months! It goes on and on — Rosamund's been at it for ten years! Ten whole years, and at the end of them she's engaged to that ridiculous little Percy St. John Vevy, —" she mouthed the name absurdly, — "and she'll marry him, and go at it for ever and ever, Amen. Oh, I know women are athletic nowadays, and all that, but mother's not that kind, and even the athletic ones go to balls and 'at homes' and dinners and things. Thank goodness the tiny waist has gone out, or I suppos. they'd be doing me up so that I could n't breathe!"

"Your waist is n't very colossal, after all, is it?"

"I don't know. No, I suppose not. I'm skinny, rather. Max calls me a May-pole. Is n't he a jolly boy? He's staying with his great-aunt, Mrs. Delaney, you know. She's a dear old lady. Miss Alliston, why don't you tell me to shut up?"

"Would you if I did?"

"No," frankly, "because I'd know you did n't mean it. If only the mother knew! She thinks I'm so safe and sound talking to you."

"Well, are you not? I thought I was keeping you out of mischief beautifully."

"You're not. You look so sympathetic — you're doing me a lot of harm."

"I'm sure I've been most discreet."

Violet laughed.

"I'm coming to your dinner next week," she said; "I bet it'll be fun."

"I thought you hated dinners."

## "A SLIGHT DIFFICULTY"

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Violet winked at her.

"Not that sort."

"I'm sure Mrs. Stanley-Browne should feel honoured," Helen said, rising; "I'm afraid we're going now."

"Oh, are you? I wanted to show you the setter Max gave me — never mind — good-bye."

The day of the dinner and the bit of a dance arrived in due course. Lady Dungay had not accepted the invitation, nor had several other ladies who had not called, but who had been expected to jump at the chance of a good dinner.

The Darcys made an heroic effort for their cousin George's sake, and came.

Charlotte Waring came with Max Gunning. Squire Ellgood and his wife were there, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Smythe, and a few others.

All that day Helen was kept hard at work. Her cyclopædic knowledge and the work of her hands were both needed. Boyne declared angrily that she would be too tired, by the evening, to dance.

She laughed. "Don't tell, but the only times I've danced with one of your sex was when I requisitioned the miller's son, at Thorpe, as a partner. He was such a nice floury boy, and you need not despise him — he was a beautiful dancer."

"Tell me how many dances I may have to-night," he urged.

"You're very rash! Remember the miller's-son-dances were ten years ago!"

"Miss Alliston! Miss Alliston!"

"I wish I could gag the whole lot of them! I wonder I don't loathe your name," he growled after her, as she sped up the stairs.

When she came down that night in the heavy white brocade gown with its tiny thread of gold running through it, she did not look tired. She was radiant. She was rather late. To the last minute she had been kept busy. She came into the drawing-room just before dinner was announced. There was a little silence as she entered — an involuntary pause of admiration — then the wearied buzz of conversation went on. Helen moved softly forward, tall and beautiful, in the brilliant light. Her eyes sent a laughing

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challenge across the room to Boyne, and encountered unexpectedly a look that brought the sudden lovely colour to her cheeks, and made her turn hastily aside to Violet Darcy, who was speaking to her.

The dinner went off well, on the whole. Helen had a difficult part to play, as her partner on either hand would persist in talking to her, and she had to be ready to catch Mrs. Browne's hot and anxious eye, to nod or shake her head to some telegraphed query pertaining to the etiquette of the occasion. When at last she thought the time had come for the ladies to retire, she nodded to Mrs. Browne as agreed upon, whereupon Mrs. Browne performed an elaborate bow to Mrs. Darcy, and they rose and filed from the room.

Helen heard Mrs. Browne's nervous, jocose remark, "You can choose your colours, ladies; we've got a yellow and a blue and a pink and green drawing-room. Ha! ha!"

Sara, in an intricate pink silk and chiffon frock, ruined by the addition, insisted upon by herself, of heavy sprays of red roses, called across the room to Helen, "Miss Alliston, you'd better go and see if the ball-room's all right!"

Helen rose. Violet Darcy, her pretty face very pink, jumped up impulsively. "Oh, Miss Alliston, may I come too? I do love an empty ball-room."

Helen smiled. "May she, Mrs. Stanley-Browne?"

Mrs. Browne smiled amiably; she was a comfortable sort of person sometimes, when she omitted to see beneath the surface.

"Why, of course you may, Miss Darcy; but there, it's nothing to see. Just a plain little room that does for a bit of dancing, if we feel like it, when our dinner's settled down a bit."

Out in the hall Violet slipped her hand through Helen's arm.

"You're awfully grand and wonderful, but you don't mind my pawing you to that extent, do you?"

"I'm honoured. I should n't imagine you are a pawing sort of young person."

"No, I'm not. I loathe it. I've never even kissed Max," ingenuously, "and we've been chums all our lives."

## "A SLIGHT DIFFICULTY"

He's a beast; he keeps catching my eye to-night and looking so solemn, just to make me want to laugh, you know. That hot-looking daughter is rather killing, is n't she? At least, they both are, but the flashy one who tried to flirt with Max — I'll pay him out after. It's horrid bad taste to want to laugh at your hostesses, is n't it?"

"Oh, terrific!"

"Jemima!" as they entered the ball-room; "it's not my idea of a 'plain little room' — is it yours, Miss Alliston?"

Helen laughed and shook her head.

"It's tremendous!" Violet ejaculated; "what's the floor like? Oh, splendid! A plain little room! Oh, is n't the old woman chronic?"

"Is it 'all right'? Help me to inspect it."

"I'm sure it is. My goodness, what an amount of guilt there is!"

"You're sure there's not a speck of dust anywhere?"

"There could n't be. You're not going back to that deadly drawing-room, are you?"

"You forget I'm the lady-companion. I dare n't linger where inclination prompts."

"I wish I was a lady-companion!" She cast a laughing glance at Helen's gown. "D' you know, this is an old frock of Rosamund's! But when I come out properly, I'm to have new ones of my own — stacks of silly, chiffony things a mile long, and we're as poor as church mice! Is n't it absurd? We have to screw and pinch — and then to waste a lot of money on things I don't want a bit! And I can't even have a horse of my own!" The scorn in the fresh young voice was immense. "Oh, don't I wish I had the setting of fashions! No old towny goings-on for me!"

In the drawing-room there was a deadly dullness. Charlotte Waring's eyes, with tragic despair in their depths, met Helen's as she re-entered the room. Sara, very flushed, was talking loudly to Mrs. Smythe, and at the rest of the company. Mrs. Stanley-Browne was trying to talk to every one, and failing lamentably. Presently she bustled across to Helen, hot and wretched.

"My dear," she whispered, "I know you tabooed games, but don't you think now a nice game — a round

game like 'Simon says,' would be nice? They seem so dull," she added, almost in tears.

Violet had caught a few words; up to any mischief, she broke in joyfully:

"Oh, Mrs. Stanley-Browne, is that a game you are talking of? I'm so fond of games."

Mrs. Browne's face brightened; she turned to her eagerly.

"It was 'Simon says,'" she explained; "it's a splendid game, Miss Darcy, it is indeed — so cheerful and bright."

"What do you do? Is it difficult?"

"Oh, no, easy as winking." Mrs. Browne was cheering up. "You all sit round on chairs, and some one is Simon, and she starts; p'raps she'll begin by saying he blows an 'orn, and she *does* it — like this: she'll say, 'Simon says' — she illustrated the blowing of a horn — "and then you all 'ave to do it, and just when you 're all hard at work, she'll say — quick as lightning — 'Simon says' — and she'll do some other thing — wag her head or 'er leg, or something — and you all have to catch on in a jiffy, or you get caught and fined — see? Oh, it's a real fine game!"

"It sounds like it. Do let us play it, Mrs. Stanley-Browne!" Violet's eyes were sparkling. "Mother," she called across the room, "we're going to play a lovely game called 'Peter says' —"

"No, 'Simon says,'" Mrs. Browne corrected; she was beaming now; "we all 'ave to sit round on chairs," she explained to her chill listeners; "p'raps Miss Darcy will be Simon?"

"Oh, yes," Violet cried. "I'll set them some things to do!" she added in an aside to Helen.

"Oh, don't," Helen implored; "you're a wicked girl. Do imagine when the men come in!"

"That's just what I'm thinking about. Oh, won't they be surprised to see us all sitting around wagging our heads?" She burst into smothered laughter. "Oh, don't make me laugh, or I shall never work it. Do look at all the faces!"

Mrs. Browne was explaining, with much dramatic gesture, the intricacies of "Simon says." Her guests were staring at her with expressions of cold wonder.

## "A SLIGHT DIFFICULTY"

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"You are defrauded," Helen said to Violet, "for here come the men."

"Oh, bother! Oh, I *did* want Max and that nice Captain Carruthers to see us wagging our heads and legs."

"Simon says" was relegated to the background, and Tom escorted the guests to the ball-room. Tom was very red and very jocular. Helen found to her surprise that he danced really well.

"Awful waste — all this," he observed; "think of the money it'll cost, and who's enjoyed it at all?"

"I have," Helen said.

"Have you really? No bunkum? That's something then, but I bet you're the only one who has. Look at the mater, nearly in a fit that something'll go wrong, and Sarah ready to tear your eyes out because you look so stunning, and Marian in such a funk she can't think of anything else. And all these people turning up their noses at us. Now, if they'd do it in the right style —" he fell into a reverie.

Boyne approached, as the music struck up, for his dance. They did a few rounds in silence, then Helen spoke.

"You are very silent to-night."

"I beg your pardon. I'm rather crushed."

"By all this?"

"By you."

"Let's sit down," she said.

He led her to a small room off the ball-room.

"May I fan you?"

She nodded. "You know, a mere frock should n't make such a difference. I'm sure its rude to me somehow."

"Well, I'm not used nowadays to *éditions de luxe*, you see; they're incongruous with a wretched tutor."

"The cover," Captain Carruthers, "should make no difference."

"Out of my own mouth, I stand convicted. But, Miss Alliston, should such a beautiful edition of the Cyclopædia on Etiquette contain mention of such a low thing as a tutor, what would it say? 'A tutor is a necessary evil, to be kept at a respectful distance.'"

Beneath his laughter she detected a bitterness that hurt her.

"I don't think it would say that," she said softly; "it would say, 'a tutor is a necessary friend, to be kept within hail.'"

He laid her fan down gently.

"Thank you," he said.

The strains of the dreamy waltz the band was playing came to them softly in the silence that followed. Then Boyne said, "I sha'n't stay here much longer. I must do something — be something — but you —"

"Oh, I shall stay here," she said lightly. "I dare n't go."

He frowned in thought.

"I must go," he said strenuously. Words seemed in the air about them — hot words, urgent, passionate, seemed pulsing in the warmth; the pause was full of them, pregnant with meaning. Then he picked up her fan. "It's charming," he said in a level voice.

"It was my mother's — so was this," touching her gown. "I mean the material. I'm not one of the girls in books who, in an emergency, don a frock of their mother's, and appear, resplendent and up-to-date. Here comes Mr. Gunning — he's my partner for the next dance."

"Oh, Miss Alliston," — Max approached wearily, mopping his brow, — "could you explain, do you think, to the Miss Stanley-Browne in blue, that a waltz is *not* a polka? I've another waltz with her to look forward to; it spoils all my enjoyment," he groaned.

"I say, Gunning," Boyne suggested pleasantly, "you look done up. If you would like to rest here, I'll take Miss Alliston through the Lancers. She won't be offended, will you, Miss Alliston?"

Helen laughed.

"What am I supposed to say?"

"That it would break your heart not to dance it with me," Max cried; "you've a pretty cool cheek, Caruthers!" he added, laughing.

Helen took his arm. She looked back over her shoulder at Boyne.

"Have n't you a partner of your own?"

Their eyes met.

"Not for this, nor for number eleven," he said.

"Where's your conscience?" exclaimed Max, indignantly.

## IN DERRYLAND AGAIN

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Helen said nothing. She had turned swiftly towards the ball-room. Number ten was her other waltz with Boyne.

### CHAPTER XVII

#### IN DERRYLAND AGAIN

A WEEK later they moved "en masse" to the house in Aldford Street. Then came a period of shopping, dressmakers, milliners, tailors, and always "Miss Alliston! Miss Alliston!"

Helen had to accompany them everywhere, advise, try on, submit to be snubbed for the benefit of the obsequious dressmakers, milliners, and tailors.

"I am cured," she told Boyne; "did I say once that if I became rich I would fly to the shops and buy chiffons? Never! I would buy cabbages sooner!"

The widow, Mrs. Smythe, became apparently a bosom friend of Sara's. She brought whom she liked to the house, used their carriages, their motor car, their box at the opera, and wore Sara's jewels.

Mrs. Stanley-Browne grew more and more languid. Helen detected, beneath the powder, a mauve tint in her face, a dragged look about her eyes, that made her wonder if the languidness were entirely a matter of "commyfautness." She suggested that she should see a doctor. Mrs. Browne owned to a pain in her side, and on being assured that various ladies of title consulted Sir Arthur Gilding, of Harley Street, she agreed to do likewise.

The result was a decree of banishment to the country.

In vain Mrs. Browne besought him to give her a box of pills, and she would be all right; in vain she declared she could not do such an unfashionable thing as desert town in the height of the season. Sir Arthur Gilding was immovable. She was to live quietly for a while down in the country.

So arrangements were made. Mrs. Smythe, on condition that all her expenses were paid, agreed to take up



her residence with Sara and Marian, and chaperon them. Helen detected a stealthy, guiltily hidden relief on Mrs. Browne's part, a relief with which she sympathised deeply.

She was given a holiday one day, and went gaily back into Derryland. She took Boyne with her.

The Derrys were at the station to greet them. Even the Cherub was there, guarded on either side by Pip and Dulcie.

"He cried so, that mums let him come, and we promised Honest Injun to stand two yards back and hold his hands all the time," Pip explained.

"I measured the two yards with my feet," added Bubbles; "it's six of my feet, you know. I say, Miss Alliston, can you say —

"Francis Fribble figured on a Frenchman's Filly!  
Did Francis Fribble figure on a Frenchman's Filly? —"

Helen broke in laughing, and passed it on to Boyne.

Boyne seemed to derive an infinite satisfaction from watching the Derrys swarm about her. He and they took to each other at once: in a few minutes he was adopted as an old friend of the family, with the gracious and dignified approval of Stentor. On the way to the cottage, when the Cherub's steps lagged, Boyne tucked him under an arm, as if he had been used to Derryland all his life. In no other land would a Cherub have chortled happily, tucked away, head lower than heels, beneath a careless, manly arm. He discoursed gravely with Dulcie upon the charms of Helen; he treated Pip with a courtesy that won her heart; smiled back at Peggy. He accepted Bubbles and Bunny as fellow-men, and Bunny as a future fellow-soldier. Bunny's walk home was varied by casual and sudden sittings-down, as he persisted in trotting along backwards, a little way in advance of the others, so that he might the more thoroughly study Boyne. Helen eyed him amusedly. Bunny's earnest gaze never wandered; his eyes, from beneath slightly frowning brows, watched Boyne absorbedly. On the door-step he drew near. "Bun entah *your* reg'men," he said earnestly.

"Shall you, old man?" Boyne appeared much interested.  
"Tell Bun!"

## IN DERRYLAND AGAIN

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"Eh? Oh, we'll discuss army matters later on."

Bunny clutched his arm as they entered the hall. "Soon?"

"Yes, soon."

Boyne was ushered in as a friend of years. He was escorted about the shabby old house by a contingent of Derrys, taken upstairs to the "Theatre of Varieties," downstairs to the cellars to look at a refrigerator Bubbles was inventing. Of course a refrigerator could be invented nowhere but in a cool cellar. "You see, the warmth upstairs might get into its bones," Pip explained, "and then when the ice was put in, it'd melt."

He fell into the easy, happy days of Derryland with a charm that endeared him for ever to Pauline. Luncheon went off well. There was Helen's favourite sweet. "Mums had to get up at half-past seven to make that," Pip volunteered, "because you have to let it get quite *acshally* cold before you put the sauce over it, and then quite *acshally* cold again."

"I shall remember it for ever," Helen said; her eyes met Pauline's understandingly. When Jem filled Boyne's glass with hock, Bubbles watched the process interestedly. "That's dad's 'sidelight on an engineer,'" he observed; "and the champagne for dinner's that too."

Boyne raised his glass. "Here's to the author!" He sipped the wine. "I hardly like to drink it."

"Afraid it will be too dry?" Jem queried.

When luncheon was over Dulcie sweetly cautioned Boyne, "Mind when you get up and push your chair back, because there's a hole in the carpet just behind you."

The Cherub took a flying leap from his high chair, and landed in Helen's lap, shrieking with glee.

Boyne eyed him admiringly. "You'll have to let him enter a circus as an acrobat, Mrs. Derrington."

"And me?" Helen said, with a whimsical upward glance.

"You'll catch balls — twenty at a time."

The Derrys chimed in delightedly. The lounge and chairs were requisitioned as prancing steeds. Stentor became Hugo, the biggest and most ferocious lion ever caught in the jungle. There was much acrobatic and bare-backed

riding; much cracking of whips, imitated by clever tongues; many weird cries and war-whoops. The shabby old morning-room became for the nonce a circus.

Boyne turned to Pauline.

"I feel out of this, Mrs. Derrington. Shall I come on as the clown?"

"Let's go," Pauline laughed, turning to the door, but Boyne exclaimed at the idea of such rudeness.

"Peggy, what are you?" Helen asked. Peggy's fat little body was shaking with laughter; dimples rioted in her cheeks; she was standing by the table, doing nothing.

"Oh, she's just good old Pleggy," Jem exclaimed, swinging her up into his arms. There was a shower of spoons, forks, and napkin-rings about his shoulders, a clatter as they fell to the ground, and the rings rolled to the oddest corners they could find.

"Oh," gasped Peggy, "I was the — clonjuror!"

Stentor pounced on a napkin-ring, Pip chased him, the circus broke up as abruptly as it had begun.

"Oh, Pleggy, you've bruised my shoulder!" Jem reproached her; "and ruined the bridge of my nose!"

Peggy hugged him, pressed her cheek against his. "I *did n't* mean to, Daddy! Is it vlery blad, Honest Injln?" In her agitation her "I's" rioted.

"Oh, swleet Pleggy, not so vlery blad. One more hug, and it'll be quite clured."

Jem and Boyne went for a stroll and a smoke. Pauline turned to Helen.

"I'm off to the kitchen, to make an *entrée* or two for dinner."

"I wish you would n't," Helen remonstrated.

Pauline eyed her mournfully.

"Have you so soon forgotten the ways of the 'Red Cottage'? What are you going to do? Mind, a chat after tea!"

Helen laughed. "I'm going to revel in the Derrys."

"All right, revel away, but after tea they'll be bundled out of the room, and you and I will — talk!"

It was a warm afternoon; the breeze brought a good deal of dust to them from the building operations close by. But it was gold-dust from Fairyland — dust from

## IN DERRYLAND AGAIN

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the desert, driving shipwrecked sailors mad with thirst — dust raised by galloping horses — a regiment — fire engines — in Derryland dust was never mere dirt.

They walked a good way — the whole contingent — with Helen and Stentor. It was Helen who suggested a rest: a warm Helen, throat-encircled with Cherubic fat arms. To her ear came Dulcie's seductive whisper:

"Dear love Miss Alliston, tell us a story."

"Are you quite comfortable?" Bubbles inquired earnestly; "*will* you have my coat to sit on?"

Pip, chin on knees, observed: "There's a hole in your shirt, you know."

"Sir Walter Raleigh," retorted Bubbles, sublimely, "would n't have minded a hole in his shirt when he put his cloak down for Queen 'Lizabeth to walk on."

Helen experienced some difficulty in staying him from disrobing. She plunged diplomatically into a story.

"Well now, I'll tell you the 'Legend of the Golden Chains.'"

The new little terraces, the scaffoldings, became palaces glittering in the sun; the brick-laden fields were transformed into wondrous Eastern lands; the smoky distance became tropical, with the blue sea looming — as Helen's voice went on with the Legend.

"It was always sunny in Kandar, and all about the Palace and the land there was a beautiful glittering — a soft misty glittering it was — like sunshine. And this glittering came from thousands and thousands of tiny gold chains, so fine that one alone could hardly be seen at all. And the people of Kandar wore these chains twined about their feet and brought upwards and slung round their waists. They all wore them, save their king. Some had more than others, for it depended on how many people one had dependent on one. Each fine little chain represented some person, and whenever this person wanted some service of the wearer, the chain would pull tight, and the wearer would hurry to perform the service. Do you see? And the king's feet in their sandals were free of chains, for whom should a king wait on? Whose bidding should the king run to perform? Now this King Sadi was young and beautiful and fair. He had a lovely young wife, and

a fine little son. He lived amongst beautiful sights and sounds. Wonderful flowers and fruits grew in the land of Kandar; birds with plumage like the sunrise, and songs as beautiful as a summer shower, dwelt in the trees. Scented fountains played in the great marble halls of the Palace. While the king ate, musicians played to him, such music as only those who have lived amongst beautiful things can play. But the young king was not happy. And the young queen sent for all the wise medicine men from far and near, and they came and talked and looked grave, but they could not give happiness to the king.

"Now in Kandar there lived a peasant woman named Jehanna. She was very poor, for she had many children, but she sang as she worked, and her face was bright. Her feet were laden with fine golden chains; they glittered softly as she moved about, so that she was always surrounded by the pale glow of sunshine. Now one day she was plucking fruits from the trees when the king passed by on his beautiful chestnut horse. And as Jehanna looked at him, one of the tiny golden chains pulled, and she ran into the hut, and found her baby crying for her. And she picked him up into her arms, and held him close, hugged up tight, so that his soft little body was warm against her breast, and he ceased crying. Suddenly Jehanna exclaimed, 'Ah, the poor king! I would not be the king for all the world contains!' And those who heard her thought she was very foolish, for though physicians had to be sought from far and near to give the king happiness, and though they failed, yet the people thought it was a fine thing to be a king. Well, Jehanna thought of the king that night so that she could not sleep, and in the morning, directly she could get away, she went to the palace, and craved audience of the king. But the courtiers would not admit her; the king must not be disturbed, they said. But just then the queen came by, and she stopped, and Jehanna knelt before her, and 'Oh, queen,' she said, 'I am only a peasant woman, but truly do I love my king, and verily do I believe that to me hath been shown the way to bring happiness to my king!'

"And the courtiers were amazed at her presumption, but the queen was so anxious about the king that she was

eager to try any means to make him happy. So she admitted Jehanna to the king's presence and Jehanna knelt before him, while the queen explained to him for what the peasant woman sought his presence, and the king smiled sadly and said, 'Let her do as she will.'

"Then Jehanna rose joyfully, and she sent one Vasku, who waited on the king, for several yards of fine golden chain, and when he brought it, she knelt again, and began fastening the chain to the king's feet. And the queen cried out in horror, and all the courtiers cried out, but the king only smiled sadly and said, 'Let her do as she will.' And just then the queen was called away. And Jehanna tied four golden cords to the king's feet, and as she tied she said to herself: 'For the queen—for his child—for his courtiers—for his poor people,' and she rose and began to speak; but at that moment the king rose too: 'I must go,' he cried; 'the queen wants me.' And he hurried to the queen's chamber and kissed her hand, and asked her what she wished of him. And the queen said, 'How did you know? I was just wishing you would take me for a drive, but it does not matter. I know you do not care to come.'

"But the king went, and when he returned, he hurried to the large Hall of Debate, where all his courtiers were assembled, for he knew they wanted him. And they were astonished, for the king had not come to the hall for many days. And he listened to the difficulty they were in, and he spake wisely, and the difficulty was cleared away. And then he said that his little son wanted him, and he went to the royal nursery; and there he found his son sitting sadly, and the child cried out for a lesson in a battle with his soldiers. And the queen, coming to the nursery, was amazed, for the king laughed and played with his little son, and looked as happy as he. And as the days wore on the people realised that their king was no longer sad. He was always happy and busy, and the wise physicians wondered whose doing it was. But the king and queen knew, and Jehanna knew too, and they were very happy."

Helen's voice ceased. "Why," came Pip's eager little voice, "did the *queen* wear the chains—she was royal, too?"

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"Because she was a woman, Pip; women always wear chains like that."

Dulcie looked down at her feet.

"I've got a *heap* of golden chains — beautiful, dear, little glitt'ring chains."

"I think," Bubbles spoke earnestly, "*men* have the most chains, because a man has to run and do things for every lady in the world!"

Helen smiled. "I had n't thought of that, Bubbles."

Across the field Jem Derrington and Boyne came towards them.

"Ladies," quoth Pip, "must never wear any chains for *men*, must they, Miss Alliston?"

Helen watched the two men approaching; she smiled.

"They do, Pip," she said.

"But — they ought n't to, ought they?"

Pip waited; the other Derrys had run to meet the men.

Helen lifted her head. "Yes, Pip, I think they ought — sometimes," she said softly.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN THE RAIN

HELEN found herself in a strangely joyous world, — a June world, full of warmth and sunshine.

Mrs. Stanley-Browne grew quite homely and kind; her lapses into fashionable boredom fewer and farther between.

Tom quieted down; it struck Helen vaguely at times that he had something on his mind. And Boyne —

Helen, thinking matters over at her open window one lovely early morning in June, caught her breath there, and laughed softly. Boyne looked after one so nicely — yes, that was it — that was it. Oh, how happy she was! She stretched out her arms — out to the beautiful warm world with the scent of the red roses in it. Boyne had such kind eyes. What a glorious world it was! Surely, surely this

## IN THE RAIN

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June was lovelier than other Junes? And the red roses — she bent her head down towards them — had red roses ever such a scent before? How sweet they were! She did not wonder he had picked up that bud last night when it had fallen from her gown — it would have been a pity to throw away anything so sweet! The little breeze that had just awaked in a bed of pink clouds crept to her cheeks, laden with the wonderful scents it had brought from heaven. Boyne was so interested in her writing! It was nice to have any one so interested. Surely the breeze brought to her the scent of the sweet-pea? — that lovely hedge of pink and white and purple and blue sweet-pea that bordered the path where she and Boyne had walked last night. And surely it brought the scent of the Gloire de Dijon, too? — that great bush by which they had sat and differed over Hammond's last book. How obstinate he had been! She was sure — sure she was right. She smiled — his very face had been full of obstinacy — the light had filtered down through the leaves of the lime-tree on to him. The pink clouds were breaking — sailing away; little, soft, golden clouds hovered about the sun. Oh, what sunrises there were this June! Just such another sunrise had there been on the day *The Orbit* had taken her story, and Boyne had been so glad. How glad he had been! — It was good to have some one to be so glad. Was it fancy, or did that baby breeze come to her with the scent of the pines on it? Her dear old pines! How Boyne teased her about them! It was beneath their shade that he had talked to her of his past life. Their scent was mixed for ever for her with the web of his life — with the things he had told her that she knew instinctively he did not tell any other. Their beautiful, fragrant scent! But, after all, it was not more beautiful than the scent of the red roses. The red roses were so sweet — that great bunch he had picked her in Mrs. Delaney's garden the day that Charlotte Waring had gone back again to town after a Saturday to Monday visit — they had sweetened her room for days. And these whose scent crept in at her window — they crept into his too, he said. And surely the birds loved them too? Their songs were sweeter amongst the red roses than elsewhere,



it seemed. How they greeted each new day! And there was the thrush, that came and sang his song of greeting morning after morning.

Freesia was lovely too — freesia had a meaning all its own somehow — freesia was so *happy* — it signified happiness — it would always mean that to her, because he had been so happy that day when he brought her that huge bunch from town. Yes, he had settled his business satisfactorily, he had said, *very* satisfactorily. Somehow she loved freesia almost more than the sweet red roses. From that day — from the moment he handed her the freesia — there had been a subtle change about him somehow — he had seemed so happy, that was it. How strange it was that he was so expressive, yet so quiet! Last night — oh, she leant out from the window — out and out — the air was so warm and sweet and fragrant. It was such a good world to be in — she was so happy — so happy. Everything was beautiful. Oh, what a summer it was!

"Do you know," he said, when he had bidden her good-morning, "all sorts of hackneyed things come into my head as I look at you?"

"It is n't very complimentary, is it?"

"Well, it's the poets' fault that the things are hackneyed. They've had you for their model — they've left nothing fresh for me. You remember you could find nothing fresh to say about the blackthorn, could you?"

"You forget my childish effort."

"Pardon, I forget nothing. If I might be as natural — as spontaneous — as that effort, I should startle you, I'm afraid."

"It was rather startling," she admitted staidly. "I must warn you," she added; "Mrs. Browne comes down to breakfast this morning in a new breakfast jacket."

"Thanks," he drew a long breath; "it can't be worse than the last."

"Well, I do not know. It's green, with pink cabbage roses crawling over it, and white lace flopping everywhere — and — I expect she'll manage to fasten a blue or a mauve bow of ribbon somewhere."

"Oh, don't!"

## IN THE RAIN

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She laughed joyously.

"And I have had a letter from Marian. Oh, it's funny! She has evidently been reading a dangerous novel, wherein the heroine elopes with a penniless and worthy lover, scorning all her duke-and-earl suitors. One day Marian will elope with the young man who belongs to the days of their genteel poverty."

She turned to go in.

"Give me a minute," he begged; "that frock needs a rose."

She shook her head.

"Well, there's a thrush down there by the fountain—he's singing a song all about love and flowers and a beautiful lady."

But she had entered the room.

After breakfast he caught her in the hall.

"There's a hedge I've found *loaded* with honeysuckle."

She laughed. "You *cannot* tempt me from my duty! I've to help Mrs. Browne about the dolls for Mrs. Anderson's Children's Fête."

"Do you like Mrs. Anderson?"

"Y—yes."

"Don't damn her so horribly. Do you know, you never hear a man say 'y—yes.' Is she too worthy?"

"She gives poor children dolls whose clothes won't take off!" she said tragically.

"Is that a crime? It seems to my dull intellect a saving of trouble to the children."

"You're only a man after all! The joy of a doll—quite *half* the joy—is the dressing and undressing of it—the putting it to bed—having it ill in bed. Oh, I think a doll whose clothes won't take off is like a flower without scent—half its charm is gone."

She turned and ran up the stairs.

"Toby needs exercise!" he called after her.

She looked down at him over the balusters.

"You must be desperate!"

"I am. I'm going straight to his mistress, to warn her of the danger he is in of apoplexy!"

He was as good as his word, and the result of his representations was an order to Helen after luncheon to take

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Toby for a nice long walk. "First fetch me a nice book from the lib'ry, my dear," Mrs. Browne said drowsily.

In the library Helen paused and eyed the parrot, who was scratching his head. "Allow me," she said; and picking up a gold pen-holder, rubbed his head till his ecstatic expression made her laugh. Then she took up her book and left the room, pursued by ungrateful injunctions to teach her grandmother — teach her grandmother.

Out in the road she and Boyne paused.

"Which way shall we go?" he asked.

"Oh —" she hesitated.

His eyes twinkled; he waited courteously. There was a silence.

"Suggest somewhere," she said, with a hopeful note in her voice.

"Towards Carnford?"

"Very well;" there was a sigh in her voice that went to his heart.

"You don't sound enthusiastic," he observed.

"Oh, it's a lovely walk," she said; "we'll go past the duck-pond and the Jubilee Pump."

He looked at her. Her eyes met his defiantly; the defiance softened by the humourous lift of her eyebrows.

"Oh," he said, and he laughed at her caressingly, "shall we go to the pine wood, for a change?"

She stood a moment, laughing.

Then—"No," she said firmly, "I'm going to Carnford."

"Well, I'm not."

"Why?"

"I want a whiff of the pines."

"Oh," she capitulated, "let's go."

They turned briskly to the left, with the full approval of Toby, who had been objecting loudly and unnoticed to their dawdling.

"You spoil me," Helen said.

"You're lovely to spoil, my Lady of the Pines."

He stopped and looked back.

"It looks rather like a storm over in the south," he said, "and it feels thundery; do you think we had better risk it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, had n't you better have a coat or umbrella or something? I'll go back and fetch it."

## IN THE RAIN

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"No — don't. Do let us go now — we sha'n't have any time."

"Very well."

As they climbed the hill that led to the wood the scent of the pines stole down to them in little fragrant whiffs. At the top of the hill it greeted them with a great generous rush of fragrance.

"Oh, you dear pines, you never stint one! You are always eager to give all your scented freshness." She turned smiling eyes on him. "I think I shall set up as a pine doctor," she said; "I shall have a hydro — a pine-hydro — in the very middle of a great pine wood, and all the patients who come to me, tired, nerve-ridden, weary, listless, I'll send off to my hydro, to live in the scent of the pines; not just to go out and walk in it, as they do at Bournemouth, and places like that, but to have it *always* — all day and all night too — to be always drinking it in. There should be no treatment; just a rational, healthy system, and always the scent of the pines surrounding the patients. Of course people say they are sad," her eyes looked out wistfully into the darkness of the pines, "but it is a *soft* sadness — a restful sadness — and their scent is n't sad! Oh, it's a glorious scent!"

"I'll be your first patient," he said.

"I think you'd better be the fourth or fifth; you had better wait till I've got my hand in a little."

She glanced at him mischievously.

"Why? You're very unkind."

"Well, you would be an awful patient; I know you would."

"You'd be a beautiful nurse," he said with sudden earnestness; "what a nurse you would be, Helen!"

"I never told you you might call me 'Helen.'"

"Well, I hate 'Miss Alliston! — Miss Alliston!'"

"It's a very nice name, Captain Carruthers."

"Helen is much nicer."

"Still, I'd rather you did n't."

"Very well."

They went deeper into the wood. She paused and stood listening to the whispering of the pines about them. She bent and picked up a cone.

"Are you cross?" she said, glancing at his grave face.

"Not a bit. It only means time."

She threw the cone for Toby to run after.

"You cannot tell."

He did not answer.

She gave a little laugh. "What makes you so sure?"

"Well," he answered slowly, "when a man gives his whole life to a thing, he generally gets it in the end — even if he's sixty or seventy before he wins."

She picked up another cone, and her hands played with it nervously.

"And you would be willing to go on trying to get my permission to call me 'Helen' till you were sixty or seventy?" she laughed.

He looked straight into her eyes.

"Till I was a hundred — if necessary," he said.

And suddenly she was frightened. She turned and ran into a sunlit open space where Toby was rolling on his back on top of the cone she had thrown. "Here, Toby, go after it! Get up, Toby!" She bent over him.

Boyne's quiet voice sounded beside her. "It is beginning to rain. We'd better look for shelter."

She stood up, and tilted back her head. Little laughing drops of rain pattered lightly down upon her face.

"Oh, it's nothing; the pines will shelter us."

They stepped back and stood beneath the trees. Toby crawled after them, and crept to Helen's feet, limp and abject.

"Does n't he loathe rain?"

"Frightened that his tail will come out of curl," Boyne said.

"Perhaps."

The rain fell in sparkling drops, a playful summer shower with the sun still shining.

"There will be a rainbow."

She stretched out her arm, and let the drops fall on to her hand.

"The rain is quite cold;" she drew back her wet hand.

"Let me dry it." He took her hand in his warm, firm clasp, and dried it gently with his handkerchief. He did it slowly, drying each finger separately. She laughed. "My hand won't catch cold!"

"It might. It looks delicate."

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"It's strong!"

"Yes," he said; he looked down at it a moment; "it's a beautiful hand."

"Oh!" She tried to draw it away, but his fingers closed round it involuntarily, instinctively; the next moment he had let go.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She did not answer.

"Am I forgiven?" he asked.

She looked straight at him. "You're not a bit sorry," she said.

"No, I'm not. I know now how it feels. I wanted to know that," he paused. "If I had that — always — I could do anything."

She laughed an odd little nervous laugh.

"It would have to be in your left hand, then, would n't it? It would be rather in the way in your right. And it has stopped raining."

"Has it quite? Sha'n't we wait here till it has dried a bit?"

"No. Come along, Toby."

At the foot of the hill they paused, and looked back to where the pines whispered mysteriously in their fragrant solitude.

"Dear old pines!" Boyne said.

He looked at Helen; her eyes were on the trees. She did not know that he was looking at her. He looked till she turned and walked on. Suddenly he gave a deep little laugh.

"Perhaps it will be before I'm a hundred, after all!" he said.

## CHAPTER XIX

### HELEN RECEIVES A LETTER

**H**ELEN, to her surprise, received a wild scrawl one day from Violet Darcy.

DEAR MISS ALLISTON, — I know it's awful cheek to ask you, but Max says he's sure you won't mind, you're that sort. So could you walk over to Delton and see Flip and Flop? They're the two terrier pups, you know, and from Jarvey's last note I'm terribly afraid

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they've got distemper. Will you tell me if their eyes are running? And ask Jarvey about their food, etc., and please tell him he's to send for Morley *at once*, if he has any doubts about them. Why I'm asking you to go is, because every one would be sure to obey you, and I get nervous only knowing by Jarvey's awful letters. I hope you won't mind, but as you're quite an old friend of Jarvey's now, I thought I'd risk it. Do you remember how you met Jarvey and me and the dogs that day? Don't I wish I was there now! I've done my bob, and as I did it I looked at the queen, and thought how sick she must be of it all. I think she saw the sympathy in my face, for she smiled at me *so* charmingly! I wonder if she's as sick of it as I am? Yesterday Max came in in a hurry. Some young cousins of his were passing through town, and they were going to make up a party that evening, and go and see Buffalo Bill, and he wanted me to go with them. I was *dying* to go! I begged mother — I *implored*, but she said there were two Receptions that night, and she would n't let me. Oh, I think I could have torn that chiffon frock to bits as Lawson put it on that evening! And we drove to Lady Mendover's, and struggled and pushed and panted our way up a staircase packed, in a wedge of cross, bored people, all struggling up just as we were, and then — oh, it was so stifflingly hot! — we struggled and pushed our way down again, and drove to Mrs. Hewson Carter's and — did it again! And *that* was what I had missed Max and Buffalo Bill for! Good-bye, Miss Alliston, and please hug Flip and Flop for me, and pat Deborah, their mother, and ask her when she's going to present me with a Florum. Don't be scandalised if you read in the papers that Miss Violet Evelyn Maude Darcy has been had up for disorderly conduct. I'm getting dangerous.

Yours sincerely,

VIOLET.

Helen felt a deep sympathy with poor Violet. She went that very day and inspected the puppies, who gambolled and frisked in a ridiculous and reassuring manner. Their staid mother looked on fondly while Helen romped with them. Jarvey stood by, and told her stories of various horses and dogs he had known. The slight cold in the eyes that Flip and Flop had caught had quite gone. They were two as thoroughly healthy, plump, and absurd puppies as Helen had ever seen. She could not tear herself away from them. She was late for luncheon, and Mrs. Browne was vexed.

Stanley Hall was further upset that day. In the afternoon Charles Belmain called.

Mrs. Browne nearly expired. That he should call now — at such an unfortunate time! No servants! No Sara!

## HELEN RECEIVES A LETTER

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Struggling with the aid of a languid maid into an elaborate tea-gown, she nearly wept with mortification.

She sent for Helen with the naïve remark, "Let him see we've got *something*, at any rate!"

Helen accompanied her down to the drawing-room as the "something." She looked with a good deal of interest at the fair, slight young Englishman, who was Boyne Caruthers' friend. She liked at once his ugly frank face; the fresh, clean look about him. Presently she caught a humourous glint in his eye, and she liked him more.

He listened gravely to Mrs. Browne's voluble explanations and excuses. "It's really most unfortunate, Lord Belmain! You'll find the 'ouse like a garret! No servants — everything so plain and simple. We're just putting up with it ourselves for a little time, but of course we could n't stand it for long."

He tried to reassure her. He had only just called — he was staying at "The Red Lion" — in the next county — for the fishing. Capital old inn; he had stayed there before. And how did the tutor he had recommended suit Mrs. Stanley-Browne?

He duly admired Toby, with an inimitably comical expression as he did it. Toby prowled round him, sniffing at his boots superciliously, and yapping in between the sniffs.

"Handsome little pug," Lord Belmain said, unblushingly, and stared straight at Helen as he said it.

Helen said "Cream?" politely, and handed him his cup.

He accepted, at last, Mrs. Stanley-Browne's invitation to stay the night. He accepted when she arrived at — "And as for your night-shirt, and things like that, I'm sure Tom 'as plenty, and you need n't let that bother you!"

"Thanks—er—thanks; I shall be very pleased," he said.

Later that evening Boyne said to Helen, "Do you like him?"

"Yes; very much."

He looked pleased.

"Well, tell me to-morrow. Breakfast's always a test."

"I shall like him more — not less. He's that kind."

"Oh, that's all right."

The next morning Boyne and he retired to lounge-chairs down by the sun-dial, and smoked.



"I came here to rout you out," Lord Belmain broke the silence.

"Awfully ungallant to our hostess," Boyne murmured.

Over Charlie Belmain's fair English face there flitted a shade of determination.

"We were getting anxious — Frank and I. I'm going to worm it out of you."

"Worm away."

"That old chap — Baldwin — did die a few weeks ago and leave you a fortune, did n't he?"

"He did." Boyne let a long spiral of smoke escape from between his lips. Lord Belmain flung a stone at the sun-dial; then he laughed.

"Old brick! I say, Boyne, I'm an Englishman, you know; I'll stick to it. Hang it all, man! are you mad, or what? A fortune, and you stay *here!*"

"Yes," Boyne assented lazily, "that's about it."

"Well, here goes — *why?*"

Boyne shrugged his shoulders.

"Either the madness or the whatness."

Charlie Belmain hummed —

"Oh, his British reserve was a thing to admire —"

Boyne laughed. There was a pause; the sun beat down hotly, with a fierce impatience showing up the glaring new-oddness of the sun-dial.

Boyne sat up in his hammock chair, leaned forward, his cigarette between his fingers.

"I'll tell you this — I may stay here for another year — two — *three* years."

Charlie's face sobered; he sat and stared straight in front of him.

"So it is that," he said slowly. "Frank was right. She said, '*Cherchez la femme.*'"

Boyne leaned back again, and put his cigarette between his lips.

"Did she really? It's commonplace — it's not worthy of Frances."

"Well, she was right. Unless," his sober eyes twinkled, "she should have said '*goddess*' for woman."

## HELEN RECEIVES A LETTER

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Boyne clasped his hands behind his head, and did not answer.

"Is n't there any other way, old man?"

Boyne's answer was prompt.

"I don't see any. I prefer this way."

"Well, good luck to you. I'll be best man, and I'll tell Frank to hold her tongue."

"You need n't; she will. Is anything settled between her and Percival?"

"No; she sent him off to the North Pole, or somewhere, a month ago, to see how much she would miss him. I believe that's to settle it one way or another."

"She should have gone with him; *that* would settle it a good deal more decidedly. Nothing like a long voyage — unfailling test."

"I think Frank will have him in the end — he's a decent chap. Mrs. Waring says that's just why she won't. But Frank's a sensible old girl in the main." He flung another stone at the sun-dial, took one of Boyne's cigarettes, lit it, and smoked in silence awhile.

Boyne broke the silence lazily. "I say, old man, do tell me how you came to display your incongruous classicality to these people?"

Charlie smiled. "Oh, it was just a bit of assing. I made some allusion to some old chap, and they looked so struck, I piled it on for fun. I dragged in one after another — quotation after quotation — all classical, you know. The old lady's face was rich! 'And that's how the aristocracy speaks!' I heard her say to one of the Miss Brownes — Eliza or Jane. And hence their desire to educate that poor fool of a John or Tom up to my level. *Comprenez?*"

Boyne nodded.

"When I wrote to you, half in fun, offering you the place, I imagined you here for a month at the most."

"When I entered the portals of Stanley Hall," responded Boyne, "I said in my folly, 'A telegram — a relative dying — to-morrow morning at the latest!' I was cogitating whether it should be an aunt or an uncle — and then I changed my mind."

"And it's all through me!"

"You make a sweet little cupid, don't you?"

Charlie eyed him thoughtfully. "Well, I've done pretty well for you, anyway, old chap."

"Oh, bless you!" Boyne said earnestly.

## CHAPTER XX

### TOM CONFIDES IN HELEN

HELEN leant her chin on her hand and looked out thoughtfully into the garden. In her lap lay the novel she had been reading aloud. Beside her Mrs. Stanley-Browne slumbered peacefully.

From somewhere in the house Tom's stentorian voice echoed. "I say, Carruthers, where are you? Come for a ride."

She waited in tense stillness. The answer reached her, though it was not loud. "It's too hot."

She leant back in her chair. There it was again! What had come to him lately? It seemed to be always too hot for him to do anything. Yet these days were no hotter than many in the last month. But that was June. June had gone now; it was July. Well, she had known, or she ought to have known, that no month could be like that June. It had been such a sweet little month, — a month that stood alone — all by itself, — distinct from other months somehow. The last evening of it had been long and beautiful. She had sat out on the terrace, and watched it go. Boyne had sat beside her. He had teased her about the pines — and then they had grown quiet, because the beauty of the evening had made them quiet. They had talked a little of pain and sorrow — both had seemed so far away — the sky above so deeply blue; the stars so full of peace and hope. She had quoted, she remembered, those lines of Keats:

"'T is blue, and over-spangled with a million  
Of little eyes, as though thou wert to shed,  
Over the darkest, lushest, blue-bell bed,  
Handfuls of daisies."

She had wondered if pain and trouble would be eased in the bearing of them by beautiful sights and scents. He had been so sure they would not — so sure that if you'd got to bear them no outside things could make any difference. He had argued that all one's feeling would be absorbed in just bearing the trouble. He had agreed with her in her conviction that beautiful things with associations would unnerve one. He had been troubled because she was so much in earnest. "You speak so strongly about it — about always holding yourself in — not letting go of yourself — not daring to go near beautiful things that belonged to the past," he had said. She remembered now the sudden shiver of misery that had come upon her, and she had cried out, "I feel that only so could I be strong — that once I let myself go, there would be no hope for me. I should shut up the trouble —" and he had stopped her. "Helen, don't," he had said; he had touched her arm gently, and silenced her. The scent of the red roses had come to her, and she had grown glad — oh, so glad!

The garden was blotted out in a sudden mist.

That was the last night of June. Since then something had happened; subtly, insidiously there had come a change. Boyne had a cough; he admitted that it kept him awake at night. Well — the garden shone suddenly clear and distinct — if that were enough to make him never want to do anything — never play tennis with her. She gave a little laugh.

Mrs. Browne stirred and opened her eyes. "You might read me what dresses they wore at Lady Wilmington's reception, my dear. To think Sarra was there now! I'm sorry Marrian did n't go too. Marrian's very retiring and sensitive, you know. I hope Mrs. Smythe won't leave 'er out of things."

Helen began: "'Lady Wilmington herself was clad in a beautiful, soft indescribable tone of mauve —'"

The room was very hot. A blue-bottle buzzed irritatingly against the window-pane. Toby lay panting alarmingly, routed now and then by a wasp. Toby's pug nose had once been stung into an unbecoming bump, and Toby fled terrified at the approach of the enemy. Helen read on. She did not skip so much as a lace medallion. When at

last she had come to the end of the long list, she was told to take a message to the Rectory, and give Toby a walk.

When she started she found herself, from force of habit, listening — waiting — then she hurried off at a brisk walk, her head erect. She had not gone far before she heard a step behind her that she knew, but she did not slacken her pace. It was a long while before the step overtook hers; then Boyne spoke grimly. "You're — in — a hurry," he said.

"Oh, you? Yes, I am. I have to go to the Rectory, and I want to have a long walk after that."

She did not look at him. Angry shame of herself for that morning's weakness made her almost hate him.

"It's rather warm, is n't it, for such energy?"

"No; I don't think so."

He dropped behind. "You're too energetic for me."

"You are so lazy," she laughed; "good-bye."

She walked on alone. Last month — She began to hum a tune, she spoke to Toby, lagging in her rear; she entered the Rectory gaily, transacted her business, and departed for her walk. She picked honeysuckle — a great bunch of it — pink, yellow, palest green — tearing her frock and hands amongst the blackberry brambles, striving eagerly after the beautiful pieces swaying high against the blue of the skies. She walked along the sun-and-shade-speckled lanes, picking no other wild flowers, loving the honeysuckle by itself.

Toby waddled after her, subdued and panting, behaving in an unusually respectable manner, so that his customary yap, yap, yapping came as a surprise when he stopped beside a gate and barked energetically into a wheat field. Helen ordered him to come along; went along herself, but Toby refused to budge. She came back, and as she drew near, Tom suddenly appeared, very red and very defiant, on the other side of the gate.

"Oh, it's you he is barking at," Helen said.

"S'pose so," Tom muttered; he cast an uneasy glance back over his shoulder. "I say, Miss Alliston, you've been robbing the hedges, have n't you?"

"Yes." Helen moved on. Tom leapt the gate and came to her side.

"I say — wait a moment, will you?"

She turned. He stood, red and awkward.

"Oh, I only — I mean — is n't it time you turned back, Miss Alliston?"

"Not quite. I want to go to the end of the lane."

"You'll be late for lunch, don't you know?"

She went on, leaving him standing there. He stood a minute, then turned, and went in the opposite direction.

Helen walked on, wondering vaguely about him. As she neared the end of the lane, she saw in front of her a figure that she recognised as Grace Kemp's. She wanted to ask her about a wild flower she had come across, and hurried after her. "Grace!" she called; "Grace!"

She had been to the farm several times since the day she had run the thorn into her finger, and had grown to like the little pippin of a mother, and the pretty, capable daughter; so that when at last Grace turned, and Helen saw that her cheeks were wet with tears, she felt a quick sorrow, and wished she had not called her. Treating her as she would have been treated herself, she began quietly to ask about the little mauve flower that she had found growing by the roadside.

"It's a meadow crane's bill," Grace told her. A miserable little sob choked her words, and she burst into tears again.

"Oh — excuse me — Miss Alliston — but — but —"

"I'm so sorry, Grace. I wish I could help you. Can you tell me about it?" The sympathy that Helen always expressed in her tone went straight to the poor child's heart.

"I'm in such trouble, Miss Alliston! I — I don't know what to do. I wish I might tell you — but — I'm afraid — he — would n't like it."

Suddenly there flashed into Helen's mind the memory of Tom's abrupt appearance from the wheat field, his red face, his uneasy manner. Quickly little occurrences, words, actions, rushed into her mind, and she understood.

"Poor child!" she murmured. "Grace, if I can do anything to help you, I will."

"Thank you." She looked up with piteous blue eyes drenched in tears. "It's so hard to know — what's right — sometimes."

## HELEN ALLISTON

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"Yes. Grace, does your mother know?"

A rush of scarlet dyed the girl's face.

"Some — I mean — she knows he — he —" she stammered, and fell to twisting her wet pocket handkerchief.

"I'd tell her everything, Grace," Helen said gently; "she loves you so."

"She does know most," she explained eagerly; "only not — not — how I — I care —"

"Tell her, Grace. There's no one like a mother, after all. She'll help you — somehow."

She was late for luncheon. Tom eyed her furtively as she entered the room. She was thoughtful throughout the meal, and he grew visibly more uncomfortable. He did not get an opportunity of speaking to her till after dinner, when she sat by the windows working a beautiful monogram — T. S. B. — on a piece of pale blue ribbon for Toby's adornment.

"That for Toby, Miss Alliston?" he began.

"Yes."

"Awful waste," absently.

She worked on.

"Miss Alliston," he began again, and his voice disarmed her, "I know I'm bothering you," humbly, "but — but you know, if you'd just let me speak to you a bit — I won't be long."

She looked up from her work.

"Well?" she said.

Tom swallowed hard.

"I — I don't know if you came across — er — Miss Kemp this morning;" his blushes were pitiful. Helen wished he would n't do it — the evening was hot enough already.

"I met her," she said.

He nodded. "Well — I — I hate doing things underhand — but a fellow's in such a beastly fix sometimes. There's the mater —" He paused, and eyed his mother affectionately. "Look here, Miss Alliston," he broke out, "can you see any good in people apeing their betters, and putting on side and all that sort of thing, when they only get despised for it, and never make any real friends? Is n't it a jolly sight better to stick to your own class?"

## TOM CONFIDES IN HELEN

Now, would n't the Kemps make real nice friends for us? But no, they're beneath us all of a sudden, because we happen to have some money! I'm sick of it, and that's the truth. Many's the chat I've had with old Kemp. That's the life for me! Give me a jolly farm, and see how I'd spend my money on it. It should be the best farm in England! That's the life for me!"

In his excitement his voice had risen. Mrs. Browne looked up anxiously from the halma board. "What's that you're saying, Tom dear? Oh, how wild you do speak sometimes, darling! You quite upset me!"

Tom's face sobered into a fiery sullenness. When his mother had resumed her game, he turned to Helen. "There!" he said in a low voice, "you see how it is, Miss Alliston. How can I upset her? And the Kemps have got their pride. Gracie's awfully proud. She won't have me without the mater consents;" his voice shook; "and her people'll be telling me I'm not to hang around, I expect."

Helen looked at him gravely.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Stanley-Browne will never consent," she said gently.

"They're as good as we are — every bit. If it comes to family, they're better. And once the mater knew her, she's bound to like her. But she won't know her. Look here, Miss Alliston, if only you'd try to bring the mater round a bit! You could do it, if any one could. You could bring any one round. If you'd only try to make her get used to the idea of the Kemps as friends, the rest'd come later. You will try, Miss Alliston, won't you?"

"I will try, but I am afraid you have too much faith in my powers."

"Oh, no, bless you! Thanks awfully. I'll never forget it."

She smiled at him. "I would like to help you," she said simply. "I believe you would be good to Grace, and I am very fond of her."

Tom's honest face was aglow.

"I would," he said huskily; "I know she's a lot too good for me, but I — I'd make her happy —"

"Tom dear, come and play a game of halma with me," Mrs. Browne's voice broke in again. "What are you whispering about over there?"



Tom, made brave by Helen's last words, seized what he thought an opportunity, and began loudly, "We've been talking about farming, Mater. I say, that's the life for me; give me a good, well stocked farm, and see how I'd get along!"

"Tom! Oh, Tom dear!" his mother's voice was faint with horror; "only common people keep farms!"

"No, they don't. Look," desperately, "at the Kemps now!" At that point his courage suddenly failed him. "Never mind now, old girl, come on, see if I don't beat you," and he sat down, and began arranging his men.

Mrs. Browne opened her mouth to speak, but wisely shut it again, and the game began.

Boyne, released, strolled across to Helen, and dropped into the chair beside her.

"It's terribly hot in here, isn't it?" he said.

"It is rather. Why don't you go out into the garden?"

"Will you come?"

"Oh, no, I'm interested in Toby's monogram."

She worked on quickly, and he watched her in silence. Presently she looked up with a little laugh.

"Tom was quite eloquent, wasn't he?"

"Immense."

She glanced towards the table.

"I'm sorry for him."

"How praiseworthy of you."

"Anyhow he made a quarter of an hour pass quite quickly."

Boyne smiled.

"I take it," he said.

The scent of the honeysuckle she had picked that morning, and put into a bowl, came to her. She said, looking at the letter she was forming, with her head on one side, "Did n't I get some beautiful honeysuckle this morning?"

"You must have gone a long way."

"Oh, I did. It was a good thing you were wise, and did not come with me. I had a lovely walk."

"You mean it would not have been so lovely if I had been there?"

She laughed lightly.

"Well — that sounds rude, but it does spoil a walk to

## TOM CONFIDES IN HELEN

have some one with you who is too lazy to enjoy it properly — now, does n't it?"

"Irretrievably, I should say."

She nodded. "Is n't that beautiful?"

She held out the ribbon to him.

"Wonderful."

"Don't I make you feel ashamed of yourself?"

There was an odd little pause before his answer. "Yes," he said quietly, "you do."

She did a wrong stitch, and had to unpick it. When she had threaded her needle again, she turned to him smiling.

"Do you know, I can't think *why* you don't go to bed?"

He rose slowly. "I'll go into the garden anyway," he said.

"Mind you don't fall asleep on a seat — the dew is rather heavy," she called after him softly.

"I'll try not to," he responded, "but if I'm not back by the time you all go to bed, you might send Toby and Polly out, will you? They'd rouse the Seven Sleepers."

Helen worked on a little while, then slipped out and sat in a rocking chair on the terrace. She could hear a slow tread crunching the gravel down by the fountain. She knew it was what he called his quarter-deck, and she knew he could not see her from there.

After a while the step ceased. She saw him, through the trees, pass across the lawn, and sit down on a rustic seat.

After a long while he rose and came slowly towards the terrace. She called to him mockingly, "Are you walking in your sleep?"

"No, I'm awake." He came up the steps. "Have you been out here long, Miss Alliston?"

"Ages. I grew tired of my work just after you came out."

He came close, stooped, and looked out into the garden.

"What *are* you doing?"

"You could see me from here?"

"Oh, yes! I saw you sleeping."

"You know I was n't asleep."

"No, I don't. Is n't it funny how cross people always get when they are accused of having been asleep?"

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He did not answer.

She laughed.

"See how cross you are! And just because I saw you fall asleep on that seat!"

She saw him grind a stone into the step with his heel.

She rose. "Don't!" She put her hands up to her ears. "What a horrible noise!"

He turned on her savagely.

"I'd like—I'd like," he muttered through his closed teeth, "to shake you!"

She took her hands down from her ears. "Did you say good-night?" She turned to go in. "Good-night," she said smiling.

## CHAPTER XXI

### MRS. STANLEY-BROWNE DROPS A HINT

MRS. Stanley-Browne's suspicions were aroused. In the days that followed Tom's outburst, Helen had a wearisome part to play. True to her promise to him, she worked hard to bring his mother to a better understanding of the Kemps. But there was a daughter. Mrs. Browne could not get beyond that fact. Of course she was trying to get Tom. A thoroughly nice girl, was she? Pooh, Miss Alliston was easily taken in. A designing little hussy! Gentlemen went in for farming nowadays? Not gentlemen in Tom's position. Helen cited the case of a friend of the Derrington's, a young fellow who had done well at Cambridge, but had chosen to take a farm. "Was 'e titled?" she had been asked, and had been obliged to say "No." Mrs. Browne had immediately disposed of him—"Oh, a young man with low tastes—such things do 'appen. I pity his poor mother."

Helen went to the farm to see Grace and Mrs. Kemp. The little front garden was a bower of roses now. The path was bordered with prim, old-fashioned standard roses. The stiff little sitting-room was fragrant with their scent.

Mrs. Kemp was worried, but firm. Grace was to have

## MRS. STANLEY-BROWNE DROPS A HINT

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no more to do with Tom till his mother gave her consent Helen cheered Grace as well as she could, and departed, laden with a huge bunch of roses. On her way back she met Boyne. She held up her roses to him. "Are they not lovely? They're from the Kemps' garden. I shall be ashamed to go there soon."

"Thomas should be grateful to you."

"Should he? Well, let us hope he is. Are his lessons finished for this morning?"

"He thought he'd be funny, I think. Anyhow, he got up suddenly and jumped out of the window. He's really very witty at times. He has missed his vocation; he should have been a clown in a circus."

"Well, you should be grateful to him this morning, I think."

"Am I walking too slowly for you?" he asked suddenly. She glanced swiftly at him.

"One does n't want to hurry on a day like this," she said gently.

They walked on in silence.

She pondered, puzzled and wretched, on the expression she had caught in his eyes.

"Will you," he said slowly, "will you come up to the pines this afternoon?"

She answered quickly, impulsively.

"No! No!" she said.

He did not say anything.

She tried to cool her cheeks against the softness of the roses' petals; there were red roses in the bunch — sweet red roses.

"The hill is rather appalling on a day like this, isn't it?" she said evenly.

His tone was queerly out of all proportion to the theme.

"No!" he said with a sort of savage quietness.

She raised her eyebrows.

"Don't you think so? Oh, well, you'll forgive me if I beg to differ, won't you?"

"I don't feel exactly forgiving towards you," he said grimly.

"Here's the chessboard, and Mrs. Browne in the landau."

## HELEN ALLISTON

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"Miss Alliston, you've been gone a long while, and Mrs. Anderson came about that 'Boys' Fund,' and —" the landau carried the rest of her words up the drive.

After luncheon Helen came suddenly upon Boyne in the study. He was coughing terribly; she turned and left the room softly. He had not seen her. Later she met him on the terrace.

"No pines for us this afternoon," she said gently; "Mrs. Browne wants me to drive with her."

"Will you come to-morrow?"

"How can I tell? I may be wanted again."

"Well, I want you," he said abruptly.

She laughed nervously.

"I wish —" she began.

"Well?"

"It's about your cough. Ought n't you to see some one?"

He frowned impatiently.

"Just for a cough? It's nothing —"

"Miss Alliston! Miss Alliston! I'm going to get ready. Come along!"

Helen went slowly into the house.

"I wish you would," she said gravely.

"Well, I won't!" he said grimly.

In the landau she suggested driving towards Woodleigh. Grace had mentioned that morning that she was going to take a bunch of her roses to the Rectory in the afternoon. Helen reasoned that Grace, in her pretty grey frock and the hat with the pink roses, would look at her best. She hoped to meet her on the road.

The Fates were kind. She and Mrs. Browne met her on a hill up which the two fat horses walked at a very dignified pace, and so had a good view of Grace, cool and fresh, walking down it. She blushed and smiled shyly at Helen from beneath the brim of the hat with the pink roses.

Mrs. Browne smiled kindly.

"Pretty gal, my dear. You know 'er? Where's she staying? With the Deanes? She don't belong about here, or I should know her."

Helen said demurely, "Is n't she pretty? I always think she looks so refined."

## MRS. STANLEY-BROWNE DROPS A HINT

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"Oh, you can always tell. There's no mistaking a lady, my dear, and that I always do say. You can always tell when a person's vulgar, can't you, now?"

"Oh, yes;" Helen eyed her gravely; "no one could think Grace Kemp was vulgar."

Mrs. Browne jerked herself upright, discomposing Toby, who started barking angrily. But for once his mistress was deaf to his voice, and for once she forgot to lean back gracefully against the cushions.

"D'you mean to tell me *that* gal is that young hussy at the farm! I *thought* there was something funny about 'er! Artful little minx, peeping up under 'er 'at like that! I'd like to know what the world's coming to, if common farm folk dress up, and ape their betters like that gal!"

Helen, hearing wearily for the rest of the drive, variations on the theme of "designing minxes apeing their betters," decided she was indeed an heroic friend to the two lovers. For she had foreseen this; she had known what meeting Gracie would entail.

She said to Boyne, when he met them in the hall, "I think I'm getting too good for this world."

His eyes twinkled. "I should n't have thought it myself," he responded with a little sigh.

She smiled at him charmingly as she crossed the hall.

"You go and get a lady-love beset with barriers, and you'll see how good I'll be to you and her."

"If that's all—" he paused; "what sort of barriers must they be?" he broke off; "being miles above me, not caring a hang about me, beauty—will those do?"

"Oh, they're not the right kind at all."

"Unkindness—rudeness—scorn—hard-heartedness—will *they* do?"

She shook her head.

There was a tiny pause. She laughed.

"She must have a papa who objects, and that sort of thing," she said, and ran up the stairs.

Up in her room she went to the window and looked out thoughtfully; all the laughter had gone from her face. She looked sad and worried. A little smile parted her lips presently; it was a sorrowful little smile. "He is so

terribly obstinate," she sighed; "he *ought* to see some one about that cough."

When she went down to tea she found only Tom in the blue drawing-room.

"Is the old lady coming round at all, Miss Alliston?" he asked eagerly.

"I am afraid not. But I have a message for you —" she paused and smiled at him.

"A message?" his face grew scarlet; "who from? You — you don't mean —"

She nodded. "Grace asked me to tell you," she said gravely, "that though she may never marry you, she will never marry any one else."

Tom said nothing for a minute; then he burst out, "She's miles too good for me —"

The entrance of his mother cut short his rhapsodies.

After dinner that evening Mrs. Browne desired Helen to play to her. Presently her regular breathing told them she was asleep, and Helen wandered on into a charming little air that Jem Derrington had written out for her, and which had been composed by a friend of his.

Boyne rose; he came close to her.

"You have n't played that since the evening of the day we went up to the pines," he said.

She gave an odd little laugh.

"I am doing it to try and soften your heart."

He sighed. "I don't think it needs softening," he murmured.

"I — I want you to see some one about your cough."

He muttered something angrily.

"I wish you would." She looked up at him, playing softly with one hand.

"I won't."

"You're horribly rude to me."

"You deserve it."

"I?" Her surprised eyes made him smile unwillingly.

"Yes, you. I believe you want to get rid of me—that's why you urge me to see some one about a mere cough."

"Very well."

She turned back to the piano, and broke into a gay waltz air.

## MRS. STANLEY-BROWNE DROPS A HINT

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"Will you come to the pines to-morrow?" He bent down to her.

"You would spoil them in your present mood."

Mrs. Browne awoke. "I do think a game of 'alma would be nice now."

"Charming," Boyne said.

"Miss Alliston, you might go and write that letter to 'Peter's.' I'd sooner it was wrote to-night."

Helen rose. Boyne held the door open for her. "Thomas," he said, as she passed through, "is down by the sun-dial. I saw his cigar just now."

"Thanks. I'll join him when I've written the letter."

He bent a little lower. "Shall I go and ask him to wait there?" he asked courteously.

"Thanks, you need not trouble. I shall find him."

He bowed and drew back; he closed the door softly after her.

She went to the library and wrote the letter. Polly, his cage covered for the night, was blissfully quiet, dreaming probably of further discordant aggravations to be screeched on the morrow.

When Helen had written the letter she went out into the garden. She felt that she wanted to think. But almost immediately a bright speck of light that heralded a cigar bore down upon her. Tom's voice accosted her joyfully.

"Oh, this is fine! I just wanted a chat, Miss Alliston!"

"I am afraid you have come to the wrong person then, Mr. Stanley-Browne. I want to be quiet."

"Oh! Oh, I say, but it was you I specially wanted, don't you know. You see, Gracie —"

Helen turned her shoulder to him, and looked out into the night.

"Gracie," pursued Tom unabashed, "is so awfully proud. I don't blame her, don't you know; I like a girl to have her pride. But it makes it jolly hard for a chap to know what to do."

"You have said all that to me already."

"Oh, by Jove, have I really? Lover's rhapsodies, don't you know, and all that —"

She turned to him determinedly. "I want to help you and Grace," she said, "but unless you have something *new*



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that you particularly wish to say — ” she paused suggestively.

“ Oh, all right, don’t you know,” muttered Tom uncomfortably, and was silent.

In the sweet, still fragrance of the night she stood and tortured herself with the question, “ Why did n’t she want to go to the pine wood? Was it entirely because she thought the hill-climbing might be bad for Boyne?” She did not want him to go. His cough had pulled him down so, and the hill was steep and the weather hot, and any exertion seemed to tire him out now. But she knew that that was not all. And suppose he guessed?

“ I will go to-morrow!” she decided.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE STORM

**B**UT the next day dawned hot and heavy; the heat haze danced over the flower beds, as Helen looked out from her window. As the day grew older, it grew hotter, there was no breeze; it was close and sultry.

Helen’s fear that Boyne would guess at that deeply hidden reason for her not wanting to go to the pine wood—her own shame of it—were crushed down, overcome by the far stronger reason—that the climb on a day like that would be bad for him.

So when, on Mrs. Stanley-Browne’s retirement after luncheon, he asked her if she were coming to the pines, she shook her head.

“ I can’t face that hill.”

He leant his shoulders against a stone pillar of the terrace, and looked down at her.

“ Remember what is at the top, Miss Alliston — ”

“ I say,”—Tom looked out from the blue drawing-room,—“ is that the pines you’re talking of, Carruthers? I’d like to see you climb that hill a day like this!”

“ Should you?”

## THE STORM

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"By Jove, I should —"

"Has Mrs. Stanley-Browne gone to her room yet?" Helen put in swiftly.

"Just this minute. Do you want her, Miss Alliston?"

"No, it does n't matter." She did not glance at Boyne, but she felt that his eyes were on her.

"Well, so long," observed Tom. "I'm off to the Rectory for a game of tennis."

He departed. Silence reigned on the terrace. Helen fought against a longing to glance at Boyne; but after a while, her eyes went slowly, unwillingly, to his.

He smiled a queer little smile.

"I'm going to the pine wood by myself," he said.

She bent and stroked Toby.

"Just out of obstinacy."

"Why should n't I go?"

"Oh, certainly, but also — why should you?"

"You to ask me that! You, my lady —" His voice slackened; she rose.

"Shall you take Toby?" she filled the hiatus swiftly, easily.

"Of course."

"He does n't want to go — it's too hot even for Toby."

He picked up his Panama.

"In an hour's time picture me at the top of the hill, warm, but permeated with the scent of the pines."

She recognised his inexorability. She watched him go down the terrace steps. Thought crowded in on her; she cried out softly, "That was too much for me. I think I'll come."

She flushed beneath his glance.

"Very well," he said quietly.

When she came down a few minutes later, she observed, "You might at least pretend you are glad that your speech decided me to come."

"But it did n't."

She gave a little laugh. "It's not very pleasant having a companion who's in such a bad temper."

"I'll walk on the other side of the road."

"You might get run over."

"You need n't look."

They walked on in silence. There was no breeze; before them the heat-haze danced mockingly. Great, sullen clouds hung low over the blue of the sky; the cows lay about, too hot to stand.

"Beautiful afternoon, is n't it?" Boyne said cheerfully.

"Oh, delightful."

They toiled on up the long dusty road; the hedges had been clipped, and stood up, prim and dusty, all their beauty shorn from them.

Helen did not look at him. She spoke once or twice, and received monosyllabic replies. She faced the hill sturdily, and Boyne kept beside her. She saw him, from the corner of her eye, wipe his brow with his handkerchief, but when she spoke to him, his voice was cool and calm. Once he lagged a little, and she turned laughingly. The laugh died suddenly; she glanced swiftly away from him. "I — I give it up!" she said; "I can't go any further."

"Perhaps — if you rest — a little," he said quietly, with odd pauses.

She shook her head, keeping her eyes carefully from his white face; she felt horribly doubtful of her voice.

"We're very near — now," he said.

"It's so hot. I can't. They're not worth it."

"Sacrilège. I'll go and bring you a cone."

"No — don't go!" Involuntarily she put out her hand. His face hardened. "I shan't be long. Don't wait — if you'd rather not."

Mechanically she drew a pattern in the dust with the tip of her sunshade.

"I think it's horribly rude to leave me like that."

"I'm sorry."

He had turned inexorably.

"Please don't go!"

He looked back at her; their eyes met. His face seemed only to grow grimmer.

"I want to fetch that cone."

She watched him go. Suddenly she turned her back on him. "I won't look." She began to walk slowly down the hill. There was an odd pain at her throat; it was the same kind of pain that had come there once, long ago, when she was a child at Thorpe, and had found a sparrow dying

## THE STORM

in the snow. She wished passionately that she had not looked at him. How he must have hated her to look! She would look no more — she would go back — at least he should not find her waiting — watching; she would leave him to come as slowly as he liked. But why had he looked like that? She had thought him so strong, and a cough ought not to pull him down in that way — But oh, how obstinate he was!

Tea was brought into the blue drawing-room. It was so hot on the terrace that the drawing-room seemed cool by contrast. Boyne had not returned. Helen poured out; she did not spill a drop, yet all the while she was watching the door. Her hands were as cold as ice.

"Capting Carruthers has n't come in yet," Mrs. Browne observed; "'e's always in to afternoon tea too."

"Here, Mater, may Toby have any more cake? I've given him enough to bust him already," said Tom.

"Oh, just a little bit more won't hurt 'im. Just look at him asking so pretty!"

"He makes plenty of noise about it."

"He's so sensible, bless 'im!"

"You mean you've only got to make plenty of noise, and you get what you want, eh, old girl?"

She glanced at him uneasily.

"I'd always give you anything that you wanted, if it was for your good, Tom dear."

"Oh, would you? why, then —"

But his mother cut in hurriedly, "Where *can* Capting Carruthers be? I can't think why he does n't come in to tea! I'll 'ave another cup, Miss Alliston."

Helen poured it out. What a fool she had been not to wait for him! Who could tell what might have happened? He had looked so bad. Dread imaginings assailed her. The cup she handed to Mrs. Browne shook in its saucer.

"The tea 'll be quite cold if he don't come soon —"

The door opened and Boyne came in. He looked cool and calm; he was smiling.

"Am I late? You 'll have to punish me with no cream in my tea, Mrs. Stanley-Browne!"

"P'raps you'd better 'ave some more made, only they

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might n't like it; you see, there's only a few servants now."

"This will do splendidly, thanks, if Miss Alliston will be kind enough to pour me out a cup."

He went across to her, and laid a small pine cone in her lap.

"It's a pity that is all you can have of the pines to-day, Miss Alliston, — they were grand."

"Thanks, it will do beautifully for a game with Toby."

She poured out his tea, then rolled the cone along the floor to Toby. Toby eyed it superciliously, and barked for more cake. Helen laughed lightly. Oh, what a fool she had been — what a pitiful fool! Just because he had looked pale she had built up horrors like an hysterical school-girl; the heat was enough to make any one look pale. He looked pale now, for the matter of that. She glanced at his clean-cut face, and laughed fiercely at herself.

He was looking at the pine cone lying, scorned, on the floor. She was glad he was looking at it — glad — glad.

Mrs. Stanley-Browne bent and picked it up. "Toby don't want it," she said, and flung it out down the terrace steps; "we don't want it littering the room."

"No," Boyne said.

After dinner Mrs. Browne wished for a game of "chummy." Cards and counters were fetched, and the four of them sat down to the game.

Mrs. Browne cheated placidly and quite unconsciously, as usual. Tom greeted her cheating with roars of laughter and good-tempered winks. It was all, outwardly, exactly as innumerable other "chummy" evenings. They played with counters. Mrs. Browne considered playing for money terribly wicked. She held the mere word "bridge" in abhorrence; that it was fashionable in "aristocratic circles" failed to move her. No amount of titled ladies could shake her faith in the two or three solid principles she possessed as her birthright. After "chummy," triumphant and beaming, she took a nap behind the pages of the *Court Circular*.

Boyne came to Helen, where she sat turning over the pages of that month's *Harpers*.

He drew a chair up, and sat down.

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"Good magazine — *Harpers*, is n't it?" he said.

"Yes. I'm particularly fond of it. I never can imagine why Mrs. Browne takes it in."

His eyes twinkled.

"I can. I told her Frances Belmain took it."

She glanced at him swiftly.

"Why did you?"

"I don't know."

"Because you wanted to see it?"

"Perhaps that was it."

She bent her head and studied an illustration.

"It's terribly close to-night, is n't it?" He said it impulsively.

"Not particularly, I think." She turned to the beginning of the story belonging to the illustration, and began to read it.

He watched her in silence.

Presently she lifted her head, with an impatient little frown.

"Why don't you *do* something?" she said irritably.

"I am doing something."

She laughed.

"It's a very subtle something."

"Yes, it is," he assented. There was a weary note in his voice that she refused to let herself hear.

"It's too hot for unravellings," she said, and went back to her story.

When she had finished it she looked up.

"You're still there? I hope you don't think I'm rude."

He bent towards her suddenly:

"Helen, talk to me a little," he begged gently; "it's been a beastly day —"

"A lovely one, I think. I'll talk to you when you think of a subject interesting enough to out-fascinate *Harpers*, she said lightly.

He was silent. She began to read an article. He rose and left the room. She held the magazine in steady hands, but the letters blurred and danced; she could see nothing but a man's tired face. She put the magazine down and rose; she went out on to the terrace. To her there came the scent of the roses. She went slowly down the steps, and

turned towards the opening that led to the path bordered with sweet pea. Her foot struck against something. She looked down; lying there, in the light that streamed from the drawing-room, was the pine cone Boyne had brought her that afternoon. Her throat contracted; she bent and picked it up, and held it gently. It was cold and damp with dew. She held it close in the warmth of her hand, and went on, down the path bordered with sweet-pea.

She came presently upon Boyne; he was sitting on an elaborately carved seat by the fountain. Her breath caught, she paused a moment, uncertain of her voice. Then she said cheerfully, "All alone?" and knew she could not have said anything more foolish.

He rose. "I will fetch you something to put round your shoulders."

"Oh, no, I shall not use it if you do —"

"You must have something," he insisted quietly; "that room was stifling."

"It is stifling here too."

But he had gone. She sank down on to the seat with a little laugh. "I wonder what he will bring?"

She waited awhile patiently, then grew impatient. What could be keeping him? She sat on there in the scented summer dark that is never really dark; bushes and trees loomed before her, queer, mysterious shapes of the night. Insidiously there crept upon her something of that old childish terror of the awful aloneness of the dark and night. She shivered as she sat; smiled at her foolishness; wished painfully that Boyne would come back. She wondered why that old terror had returned; she had been alone in that garden on other evenings, had gloried in its sweetness, its tiny, mysterious night-sounds.

Oh, how foolish she was! No, she would not go in; she would sit there, and wait and wait, if it were for hours. An odd, inexplicable foreboding mingled with the terror; a vague dread — a terrible oppression, that seemed to be somehow the climax of these last few weeks. Her fingers tightened round the pine cone; it was the only friendly thing in all that great, dark, suffocating world. And the darkness was deepening; it was coming closer — closer — enveloping her. She could hear no friendly night-

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sounds; there was only a great stillness. The darkness clung about her — suffocated her. There was no rustle amongst the leaves of the trees — they were quite still — waiting. The bushes were still too. All were waiting — what was it they were waiting for? What was it that was coming slowly, stealthily, through the night.

She strained her ears, bent forward, listening. That brooding stillness was terrible; the whole world lay waiting, just as she was waiting. Something was coming — coming slowly, stealthily, through the night.

She rose, stood erect, laughed out. The laughter broke on the silence around her with a weird effect; echoed back amongst the still trees, brought fresh terror to her. She took a step towards the house; another step crunched the gravel; Boyne was coming back.

She sank down on to the seat again, still waiting. He came towards her, walking slowly; he carried a soft white wrap of hers over his arm.

Her eyes strained through the night; she did not speak; she bent towards him, waiting.

"I am sorry I have been so long," he said.

Vaguely she felt that what she had been waiting for had come; bewilderedly she sought to discover what it was; but it eluded her, it was subtle, evasive — but it was there — something had happened — it had come.

She rose. "I told you I did not want the wrap." She waved it aside. "If I have been here all this while without it, I do not need it now."

He folded it over his arm again.

She watched the little unfamiliar gesture with no surprise. Yesterday — to-day — he would never have done it; he would have insisted on her wearing it.

"I am going in," she said.

He followed her. "There's a storm coming up."

His voice was still too — still, like the trees and bushes. She shivered. So they were waiting for the storm, the trees and bushes — that was it. And she had been waiting for something that had come; she knew that it had come, though she did not know what it was.

"I am going up to town to-morrow," he said; "have you any commissions for me?"



"No, thank you."

They had reached the terrace. From overhead came a low, angry rumbling. She looked out into the night; the darkness was pierced with a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a louder, angrier rumbling. A few heavy drops of rain fell with stealthy thuds upon the stone steps of the terrace.

"We are just in time," Boyne said.

They entered the hall; the electric light flooded it. Boyne's still voice changed, grew involuntarily tender; "Were you afraid of the storm — out there — alone?"

She gave an odd little laugh.

"And were you afraid too?" she said. She turned and went towards the drawing-room; in a mirror she saw that her face was as white as his. She shivered again, turned back, looked at him.

"Are — are you ill?" she said.

He smiled. "Oh, it's this heat."

She stood, hesitating.

He came forward and opened the drawing-room door for her. Still she hesitated; her fingers closed round the pine cone so tightly that its rough surface bruised them. She looked up at him; her lips formed the words in a breath, "What is it?"

He turned his eyes swiftly from hers; he smiled. "A horrible storm," he said cheerfully, "and it has got on your nerves."

He held the door wider. From within Mrs. Browne and Tom were looking at them. Still holding the pine cone, Helen went into the room, and as she did so the rain came down suddenly, angrily, lashing itself against the roofs of the conservatories, against the house.

"Oh, my!" Mrs. Stanley-Browne ejaculated. "Tom dear, shut the windows, will you? Miss Alliston, I want you to finish 'Lady Gertrude's Escapade' to-night."

# THE SCENT OF THE RED ROSES

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE SCENT OF THE RED ROSES

BOYNE left early the next morning before the usual breakfast hour. Helen had listened to his step going down to his solitary breakfast; she had fought against the longing to go down too, and give it to him. She laughed at herself for letting a little thing like that worry her. He would not have wanted her—it would have been absurd to go—but directly it was too late she wished deeply that she had gone. She knew there were plenty to wait on him—but she wished she had gone.

Standing within her door, she listened to the sounds of his departure. She heard the wheels of the dog-cart Tom had good-naturedly insisted on his using die away into the distance. Then she went to her window and looked out.

The storm of last night had not cleared the air; there was more to come, and the earth lay heavily waiting for it. She leant out, but there was no breeze, no freshness; the air was stifling, damp, and hot.

The heat made Mrs. Browne irritable, and her irritability took the form of investing against Grace. Helen, faithful to her promise, put in weary words on the lovers' side, but they seemed to do no good. "Wicked, designing minx! Of course she knew Tom had a fortune in 'is own right. She had n't a word to say against the best brother-in-law that ever lived, but she did wish he'd left *all* the money to her to do as she thought best with, just as 'e'd left Sarra and Marrian dependent on her, instead of leaving Tom a separate income of his own. Anyway Sarra and Marrian would 'ave to marry as she wished, or those marriage portions she'd promised them would n't be theirs." So she rambled on. She wanted a listener, and would not let Helen leave her. The long, close day dragged itself slowly away.

At nine o'clock Boyne returned. He came in quietly and found Helen on the terrace.

"So you are back?"

"I am."

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There was a queer, heavy silence.

She rushed into speech nervously.

"Has your day been satisfactory?"

He paused. "Yes," he said; "will you come down the garden, and I'll tell you some news?"

She came slowly down the terrace steps.

"I can't stay long. Mrs. Browne is nervous to-day — she cannot bear to be alone."

"Sit here, will you?" He passed his hand across his forehead. "I wish we could have another storm," he said.

"It is suffocating."

He sat down beside her.

"You've had a bad day?" he said gently.

She laughed. "Oh, Tom — Tom — eternal Tom!"

He did not answer. She looked about her nervously. Were the trees and bushes still waiting?

"Everything broods," she ejaculated impatiently.

He turned to her. "You will go to bed won't you? You're done up."

She laughed. "Oh, no. More Tom for another hour yet!"

He frowned heavily. "Say you are tired. Why should you stay up to listen to her tirades? It's absurd."

"Tell me your news," she interrupted.

He rose restlessly. She rose too, hurriedly; she put out her hand with a nervous gesture. "I — don't want a wrap," she exclaimed, then laughed. "Oh, how stupid I am. You know that I don't."

He took her hand gently in his.

"Sit down," he said, and sat down again himself.

She blushed hotly. Had he guessed what a coward she was?

"Your news?" she questioned; "it's cruel to pique my curiosity. Tell me!"

"Yes." He bent forward, his eyes on the ground. "I've had some good luck."

"Yes?" She felt no responsive gladness.

"Do you remember that old chap we talked about once — Joseph Baldwin?"

"Yes!" She turned towards him; her tone brightened, grew eager. "He has n't died and left you his fortune?" she cried.

## THE SCENT OF THE RED ROSES

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"Yes, he has."

She lost sight of that heavy oppression, that weird sense that she was still waiting; they were hustled away by the generous rush of joy she felt for his sake.

"Oh, I am glad — glad! So that was your business in town? Why, it was *very* satisfactory, was n't it?"

"Yes," he said; "you are very good."

"But oh, how bookey you are! What a hackneyed plot! I'm ashamed of you. You will leave here — how glad you will be."

"Yes, I shall leave at once."

"Of course you will! Ah, I wish I had an old man to leave me his fortune. Poor old man — how horrid we are." A horrible foreshadowing of what Stanley Hall would be without him was darkening her thoughts; she strove against it — how selfish she was!

"I shall go to-morrow," he said quietly.

"To-morrow!" She drew a sharp little breath, laughed. "Don't you have to give notice — a month's notice?" she said lightly.

He did not answer; he seemed to bend lower; then he sat up.

"I beg your pardon — no, I sha'n't give notice."

"What will you do? Oh, to think your fortune has come so soon — so unexpectedly."

"Yes," he said, "unexpectedly." He paused. "What shall I do?" he went on briskly, "why — enjoy myself — indulge my natural laziness — go abroad perhaps — wander in obscure corners, where there are no daily papers and no mails — oh, I shall enjoy myself."

"Of course you will! Mrs. Browne will miss you. Tom won't. He has been rebelling more and more lately — that reminds me, I must go in. She rose. "You have made me forget my duties, with your delightful news. You have n't told Mrs. Browne yet? Oh, of course not —"

"I shall tell her to-night."

On the terrace steps she stopped and looked up at him. "I am very, very glad," she said.

He seemed to be keeping back something behind his close-shut lips a moment. Then he spoke. "Thank you," he said gently.

Up in her room Helen sat by the open window; she was very still and quiet. No breeze crept in at the window; overhead heavy black clouds hung low; nothing moved, the air was still and suffocating. She felt that she was stifling; she felt hardly at all beyond that; she was absorbed in a wild longing for the rain to come. She waited for it as stilly as the trees and bushes waited. Somewhere, at the back of her aching mind, was a deadly knowledge that everything had gone wrong; she knew it was not mere selfishness, mere dread of Stanley Hall without Boyne, that oppressed her. Deeper than that cut and worried his pallor, his tired eyes — why was n't he gladder at his good fortune? Why did he look so ill?

She pressed her hands to her eyes. What were those words that kept eluding her — words she had read somewhere lately, about the stillness?

Oh, if only she could breathe!

She leant further from the window.

Suddenly there came to her on the dead air the scent of the red roses.

She drew back as if she had been struck; she shut down the window and sat and waited behind the panes for the rain to come.

At last the stillness was faintly ruffled; she saw in the dusk of the summer's night the leaves of the poplars tremble nervously as if in terror of the coming storm; the bushes shivered faintly. She knew the rain was coming at last. Shut in, behind her window, she watched; she greeted breathlessly the first slow drops — watched them quicken into a heavy downpour. Then, at the height of the storm, unable to bear the longing for its freshness, she opened her window and leant out. Beautiful, cold rain lashed down upon her; she held out her arms to it — it fell upon her upturned face. The scent of the wet mould came to her; and with it another scent, strong, sweet, glad — the scent of the red roses. For a minute she bore it, then she turned away, great sobs rising in her throat. She shut down the window, choked back her tears.

"Dry roses I might have stood, but wet — red — roses —"

She was feeling now — feeling it all.

## DEPARTURE OF BOYNE

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### CHAPTER XXIV

#### DEPARTURE OF BOYNE

TALK about Boyne's sudden going buzzed incessantly the next morning. Mrs. Stanley-Browne sought by every means in her power to find out the why and wherefore of his leaving. Boyne's patient parrying was masterly. Helen told him so after breakfast. "What a very polite blank wall you are!" she laughed.

"I'm in good form just now. I've had plenty of practice here, have n't I?" he added.

She nodded.

"And I too."

"Yes. Your writing —" he broke off, "that story you let me read, 'Owen Armstrong' — you have n't heard its fate yet?"

"No," she said. It struck her painfully that apparently he would never know its fate now.

"Miss Alliston, come and answer my letters, please!"

Boyne was to catch the 4.15 train to Victoria. At a little before three Mrs. Browne rustled in to bid him good-bye; she had a call to make.

"I would have liked to stay and wish you 'orryvory,' Capting Carruthers, but what with calling and all, one never gets a minute to one's self!" Pause. "I'm sure you've been treated like one of the fambly, so it is n't that?"

She waited.

Boyne looked back at her amiably.

"That can't be why you're leaving all of a sudden — because you think you've not been treated well — is it?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Stanley-Browne."

"P'raps you've heard of another situation?" A pause. "Are you going to take another place as tutor, Capting Carruthers?"

"I don't think I shall ever apply for that sort of situation again, Mrs. Stanley-Browne, but one can never tell. Will you give me a character if I apply to you?"

"Oh, certingly! I'm sure you've been very satisfactory, not but what some places would n't suit you, Capting Car-

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ruthers! You'd be too high-and-mighty for some folks, but of course that's the military air and only to be expected. Well, I'm sure I never was one to pry into other people's concerns, and Tom don't really need you any longer."

"Then things could n't have fallen out better, could they? Can I help you with that glove? Well, good-bye, Mrs. Stanley-Browne. I won't forget to apply to you for a character if ever I need one."

She was gone. Helen and Boyne stood in the trail of strong stephanotis she left behind her. To Helen, sharp and quick, came the memory of other times when they had stood so — times when Boyne had turned to her with his deep, quiet gladness.

"How you tormented her!" she said gaily.

"I'm sure I was most polite."

"I suppose you have your packing to do?"

"I do loathe packing, Miss Alliston. I bundle all my things in, and then I find I want the nethermost thing there."

"I expect you find your things rather crumpled, don't you? Well, I am going to write some letters for Mrs. Browne. She was so eager to hear the fate that befell a wicked Lady Vera, this morning, that the letters had to be neglected."

"I shall find you in the library?" he said. "I leave at about a quarter to four, you know."

"You will find me at my post," she laughed as she left the room. She went across the hall, still smiling, into the library. She shut the door and sank down suddenly on to the nearest chair; she was trembling, her face was white. She looked round the familiar, gorgeous room with bewildered eyes; at the parrot in his gilded cage, eyeing her with his head on one side. She had met Boyne here, and now he was to say good-bye to her here, and go — go out of her life. And he did not care. He chose to go. And what was it that was behind it all? What was it that she was always waiting for — that had come, and she had not understood, and so she waited still? In her mind echoed all the careless words he had spoken that morning, — the brisk, careless words. Before her eyes was his quiet face.

"Teach your grandmother! Teach your grandmother!"

## DEPARTURE OF BOYNE

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Teach your grandmother!" screamed the parrot, angry at her neglect of him.

"Oh, don't!" She gave a little breathless laugh. "Oh, Polly—it's all—just the same." She rose; she could not stay there, in that room. She went out into the garden; her steps led her involuntarily to the path bordered with the hedge of sweet-pea. She trembled again weakly, and sat down on the rustic seat, where she had so often sat with Boyne. She bent forward, clasped her hands rigidly, pressed her lips together, absorbed in the effort after self-control—control to bid him good-bye presently with decent cheerfulness.

The effort blotted out time; she did not know how long it was before a voice from the other side of the hedge of sweet-pea broke upon her senses suddenly, and shook her into sudden, acute life, every nerve quivering and waiting.

"Tell me the truth, Carruthers. Is there a hope you may n't have to undergo the operation?"

"My dear fellow, would a great surgeon own anything else? 'While there's life there's hope,' and so on. So I'm to undergo several months' medicinal treatment—to please them—but they know it'll come to the operation in the end—"

"And there's hope—you'll pull through it—if it comes to that?"

"Oh, yes."

"Why are they so reluctant to perform it then?"

"It's one that's hardly ever performed—intricate; I wormed that much out of them—anyhow, it's doubtful, and I'm to make my will beforehand. One thing," the voice Helen listened to deepened, "if I pull through I shall be sound. It won't leave me maimed and done for."

There was a silence; the hot, summer sun beat down upon Helen, white and still. She knew now what it was she had been waiting for; what had come, and she had not been able to understand. She listened deliberately; it never struck her to do anything else.

Charlie Belmain's voice spoke again. "I—can't get used to it. I thought that old wound was a thing of the past. When did it begin to—to worry you again?"

"A few weeks ago. It began with a cough, which I



did n't notice or connect with it. Then it was pretty painful sometimes — and I got so confoundedly breathless — could n't do anything. I thought I ought to see about it. Night before last — don't laugh, old man — I fainted — just like a girl! That clinched matters. I managed to get up to my room before I was quite gone, and did it in decent seclusion" — his voice broke off; he laughed; "I say, Belmain, don't look so beastly mournful. I'll pull through. And anyway — oh, it's not the operation, it's this useless waiting and treatment and fuddling about — why can't they do it now and get it over?"

"How long —?"

"Oh, months! I don't know. He talked a lot of learned jargon, but I don't care about that. I've got to undergo their treatment —"

"And Miss —"

"She's to know nothing!" Quick and sharp Boyne's voice interrupted him. "I've had my fortune left me, and I'm off to enjoy it. Well, people have queer notions of enjoyment, after all. It's half-past three — I'm going in — I'll meet you in the drive, old man."

She heard footsteps retreating, but they were not Boyne's. Why did he stay?

She rose slowly, and made her way to the top of the path; she went round the hedge. Boyne was standing there. He looked round at her, came, in a few strides to her side.

"I listened," she said.

Anger flamed in his eyes. "*Damn!*" he said; he said it between his teeth, and he did n't apologise for it.

Helen stood quite still, looking at him.

"Will you tell me where you are going?" she said quietly.

He had recovered; he laughed lightly.

"Oh, yes; come and sit down. I'm sorry you heard — I was a bit down, and piled it on, you know."

"I am glad I heard."

"Well, I'm not glad. You've got such a beastly imagination — a writer's imagination, — and you're too tender-hearted. Helen, you won't go imagining things about me, will you?"

She had pulled herself together; the icy, stony numbness

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that had succeeded the shock of sudden comprehension after that terrible waiting, gave place to a warm rush of tenderness, of self-forgetfulness. She smiled at him bravely.

"No," she said, "oh, no! But I will write to you — give you advice — scold you into being careful. And you are so strong, you know —"

"Yes, I am. That's a good girl. I'll forgive you for listening, perhaps. I was n't going to tell you, because we're — friends —"

"Ah, but that is just why you should have. Tell me where you are going."

"To a horrid Hydro in Norfolk, to be fattened up, you know, and undergo a course of treatment. All a fad —"

Silence fell upon them then. The sweet-pea, sweet still, though it was dying slowly beneath the summer's sun, swayed in the breeze; white butterflies hovered about it. Memories were clutching at Helen's heart; she drove them away with courage called forth by her care for him. Words came to her lips, and got no further. There was so much to be said.

Neither said it.

Then Boyne spoke. "I'll give you my address," he said prosaically. He took a card from a case in an inner pocket, and wrote on it. She watched him greedily, anxiously — his tiniest action — oh, why did he write so quickly? What nice hands he had — She drove back the memories, she smiled. "I know your writing. Had n't you better print it?"

"Miss Alliston, you insult me. There, is n't that beautiful caligraphy?" He gave her the card, took out his watch, rose. "I must n't miss my train."

She rose too; she was not trembling now. She faced him, steady and strong, and held out her hand. Suddenly, as he took it, her woman's baffled longing to care for him broke down her strength. Her fingers tightened round his, clung to him. "Oh, you will take care of yourself? You will — you will be very careful? You will not laugh at their rules? You will follow them all — all — oh, you are so careless of yourself! Promise me you will take care of yourself!"

"I promise, Helen."

Her lips quivered; she put up her hand, pressing it against her mouth, choking back her weakness.

He spoke very gently. "I want you to promise me something too. If you are in any trouble — if you cannot stand this place — will you let Carlotta know? She could help you — she knows so many people —"

"Yes," she said.

"Good-bye," he still held her hand, "and you will be good — you will remember it's nothing for me — you will remember that you are a writer, and imagine things —"

She smiled. "Oh, yes!" Her courage had returned. "Good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye," he dropped her hand at last.

"You — you will let me know when — if —?"

"Yes," he said; he looked at her steadily, "but it won't come to that, I expect. After all, they must know better than I —"

A smile of infinite tender understanding trembled about her lips. His brow contracted; he turned suddenly, and strode from her, up the path, leaving her standing there, looking after him. At the top of the path he turned. She was standing, erect and brave, smiling at him. The sun shone down on her. Her smile was very beautiful. Boyne stopped, then went on, and passed beyond her sight.

She stood on there, the smile growing fixed on her face. He might come back. Oh, surely, surely he would come back? He could not have gone like that. She had said nothing — and he — he had said nothing either.

No, he would come back. She must be ready for him. She would wait — she seemed to be always waiting. And there would be weeks and months of waiting. But she must not think of that yet — she must be ready for him. He would come back to say good-bye, and she must be ready — was there going to be another storm? It was growing so dark, and that silence — she could hardly breathe — She remembered those words now — they were knocking clear and distinct in her head —

"I did not think the earth could be so still.

No sound was in the air nor any breath.

When happiness within my heart lay dead

The world without was silent as in death."

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Yes, that was what had been eluding her these last two days of waiting; and it was still now — and growing so dark — oh, she would not be able to see to the end of the path — she might miss him — darker — darker — it was going to be a bad storm — it was closing in on her. Boyne would get caught in it. She must go and warn him — he was so careless — Why could n't she move?

She made a painful effort, and sank down on to the seat beside her. The earth seemed to rise up and close about her; noises rang in her ears. She tried to look for Boyne, tried to be ready for him. Through the buzzing noises came another sound — the sound of wheels rolling rapidly down the drive; they ground into her very heart — Boyne had gone.

## CHAPTER XXV

### HELEN LEAVES STANLEY HALL

“PUT it down here, please.”

The cabman put the box down with a grunt, scratched his head, cast an expressive glance round the shabby, bare little room, then looked at Helen.

“Sure this is the right place, Miss?” he said doubtfully. Helen assured him that she was quite sure.

He cast another expressive glance from the room back to her, and then, with the dubious remark, “Well, it's clean, Miss, ain't it?” took his departure.

She stood in the middle of the cabby-despised room, and drew a long breath of relief. She was alone at last — at last! She looked at the faded yellowish-grey wall-paper, at the almost patternless carpet, at the horsehair sofa and chairs. She looked into the small room that was to be her bedroom — and she drew another long breath of relief.

“My kingdom!” She stretched out her arms. “All mine! All my own! Free as a bird!” She went to the window and looked out with eyes that refused to be daunted. “I only need a Derry mind to transform all those roofs into the Domes of Palaces; the over-crowded

dust-bins into Jewel Caskets; the prowling cats into Tigers from the Jungle; the dingy washing—into what? Ah, the fluttering Sails of Ships—” She laughed. “Oh, how long since I have seen those dear Derrys!”

Mrs. Greaves appeared with the tea-tray.

“I thought as you’d be ready for a cup of tea, Miss Hallowston, and I’d bring it up all these stairs myself just to see as you were comfortable like. You can’t expect much on the top floor back, can you?” She gazed mournfully round the room. “I wish you could’ve had the same rooms as you did before—” A bell ringing insistently drew her from the room.

Helen smiled as she poured out the tea. “She is just as mournful and just as long as ever, and her departed sister Euphenie’s auburn front just as glaringly red against her grey-brown back hair.”

The tea was pale and weak. The loaf also was pale and by no means new. The butter was not very nice, and the milk was blue. “Well,” she eyed the unpalatable edibles with a determinedly cheerful gaze, “the tea is better for one—so. I have the pot of preserve Mrs. Kemp gave me, to disguise the butter, and—I have my freedom!”

After tea she sat down and wrote to Boyne:

“I have done it! On the strength of a series of short articles to be written for *The Children’s Joy*, and my ‘savings’ from my salary, and a few more pounds looming in an editorial distance, I have bidden Stanley Hall farewell, and am here—in my own kingdom—monarch of all I survey—free to be silent, cross, sleepy, restless, gay. Don’t you envy me? Big events have happened at Stanley Hall. Did n’t I warn you that Marian’s romantic elopement with Henry Walker would fire Tom to open rebellion? It has. He has declared his intention of wedding Gracie Kemp, or going to the bad. Ah, me, there have been scenes! I did my best for the lovers, but the fact that the Kemps have officially announced their determination that Grace shall not wed Tom without his mother’s full consent so bewildered Mrs. Stanley-Browne that she was quite silly—could do nothing but reiterate her astonishment and suspicions of some deep-laid plan. However, she is coming round. I left with a clear conscience. A visit to the

Kemps, a stern visit intended to overawe and annihilate them, in the midst of which Mrs. Kemp was called away because a cake was burning, softened her. It was the cake that was responsible; before she could stay herself — 'How many eggs do you use to a pound of flour?' Was n't it funny — and was n't it rather pathetic? Tom's scheme of a big farm, with himself as a gentleman farmer, and Gracie to help him, and his mother to live with them, appeals — strictly in private — irresistibly to Mrs. Browne. She was hurt and deliciously amazed at my wanting to come away. But I could not stand it any longer. And should a rising Author be a lady-companion? . . ."

She wrote about a book that she had read lately. She painted her hopes in glowing colours. Then she wound up:

"I'll say good-night, I think. Am I not good? Not one word of advice, not one word about taking care of yourself. Am I not a friend in a thousand? If it were not that I agree with the Autocrat I should say, 'Oh, man of Aggravation, who never will say anything about yourself, take up your pen, and write as I wish; do violence to your natural rude and ill-mannered reserve, but — à la Autocrat — Don't flatter yourselves that friendship authorises you to say disagreeable things to your intimates. On the contrary, the nearer you come into relation with a person, the more necessary do tact and courtesy become.' And so good-night."

Lilian came to see Helen in her "garret," as she tearfully designated it. She looked very pretty and dainty and fashionable. She ran at Helen with a little cry. "Oh, Helen! Oh, Helen! Seventy-seven stairs! I counted!" Helen began to laugh.

"It's so healthy — high up, you know, Lilian. Now remember to put all the spacious rooms you have been used to, from your mind, before you look at my little one. You'll hurt me if you don't admire it. Observe my arm-chair — now, is n't it comfortable? Mrs. Greaves exchanged a horsehair sofa for it. It was a wreck then, but a pot of enamel and a few yards of cretonne will work wonders in artistic hands, you know!"

Lilian's blue eyes gazed round the shabby little room.

"Is it because you are clever that you are so queer?" she asked naively.

"Oh, Lil!" Helen laughed out, "if I'm queer I'm afraid it is n't because I'm clever."

"Oh, Helen, do you know, one night at one of Mrs. Lee-Harding's crushes, an awful great creature pounced on me, and shouted out that we ought to be friends because you were her mother's lady-companion! I just stared at her and then I slipped away. Was n't it *awful*? And Augustus was *so* angry! You see, it hurts him that you won't live with us. It shows such a want of natural affection, Helen! I'm sure if it were the other way round I'd come and live with you at once. I could n't live alone and *here!*"

"You are different, Lilian," Helen said gently.

"Yes, I am. I hate being alone. You love to be alone always, don't you?"

For a moment something infinitely sad shone in the grey eyes looking towards the window; a bitter little line appeared at the corner of her lips. Then she spoke as gently as before. "I like to be independent, Lilian."

Then Lilian began on the old subject of her refusing to live with her and Augustus. Helen was very patient, but when Lilian had gone, she stood alone in the middle of the room, and she looked very tired.

"I know you are an ugly little bare room. I know my life is an ugly little bare life. I know that Lilian is good to want me so, but — oh, let me at least do my waiting alone!"

She went across to the window, looked out at the dingy chimney pots, the dingy articles of clothing that seemed to be always drying in the yards; the few emaciated cats that seemed to be always prowling over the walls.

"Ah, well, I must rise superior to all that!" She got out her writing materials, and began to write. As she wrote, a little worried line was drawn between her brows; it deepened and deepened. She wrote on steadily till the little wild Irish maid, Norah, brought up her tea-tray.

She took her tea across to the window in the vain hope of finding a breeze. The sun danced hotly down on the roofs, no breeze stirred the sooty, meagre leaves of the few

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bushes and trees in sight. "It must be the heat." She picked up the sheets of manuscript she had just written, glanced down a few, and tore them all across. "Yes, it must be that. That is why I can't write lately — of course that's it. When the weather turns cooler — it's September now — it will be cool soon, and then I will write." She looked out unseeingly over the chimney pots; the line between her brows deepened again. "It must be the heat. I can't get lost in anything I write now — it is all forced — feeble." A dread was growing in her eyes; suddenly she rose, laughed. "What a lot of paper I waste! Suppose I were a poor artist, instead of a poor author? Thank Heaven that an author's implements of war are so beautifully cheap. The very thought of canvases, of Whatman paper, of brushes, paints, makes me shiver."

She took from her portfolio a letter she had received that morning from the editor of *The Orbit*, and read it again. "I do not like either of these stories so well as your others. They lack the easy style, the originality of treatment that has hitherto distinguished your work —"

She looked up thoughtfully. "He took two of my old stories. Well, I must try again! If only it were not quite so hot up here! Now, what remedy would those Derrys find for that? A Palace of the Sun, and I — oh, I am a Sunshine-Princess!" She went to the window again. "Anyhow, how infinitely better to be here than at Stanley Hall. After all, I doubt if, in spite of its spaciousness, all that interminable bickering and fuss and commotion did not make it hotter than my little garret!" She leant her chin on her hand and looked out thoughtfully. "Oh, the scene when I broke the news of Marian's romantic elopement! How cruel of her to write to me and make *me* tell it. But her letter was worth it. I shall cherish it as one of my treasures — 'I have obeyed my heart; I have cast aside the bobbles of mere glittering society; henceforth I live for love and my Henry. When this reaches you I shall bear the honourable name of Mrs. Henry Walker —' Oh, it was delightful. If only Boyne could have been there just then —"

She gave herself a little shake. "To think that it has



fallen to Marian, prosaic Marian, to do great deeds — to break up Stanley Hall, for it will be broken up. Mrs. Browne will give in to Tom; and Sara — ugh! Sara will capture that loathsome little oily adventurer of a count! He was the last stroke, I think. To be in the same house as he! in the same room! to have to suffer his glances, when every glance was an impertinence! What was it about him that made me loathe him so, I wonder? Ah, well, dear little stuffy room, he will never desecrate you by his hateful little presence. I suppose I was very unkind to leave poor Mrs. Browne, when she besought me so tearfully to stay. To think she thought me worth 'ten pounds' rise'! But I do believe, now that in her secret heart she likes Grace, she will come round sooner without me there; she will be lonely, and she hates to be lonely. Sara is nothing; she just ignores her mother, except when she gibes at her."

She fell into a reverie, looking out at the filmy sky, gleaming palely blue through the haze of London's smoke.

She turned from the window at last, her lips close shut, her eyes full of pain.

"I'll go out. I'll find my way to Wordsworth's favourite view. I'll stand on Westminster Bridge, and look east — if I can, for the crowd!"

Mrs. Greaves considered it her duty to warn Helen as to the wickednesses of London.

"Never you consult a pleeceman, Miss Halliston, no matter what difficulty you're in; 'e'll be 'aving your name and haddress before you know where you are! And very like off you'll be marched to prison for a witness or an excessory, and 'ave to be dumb, no matter 'ow outraged you are, for they say as how anythink you say will be brought up against you in court. Look at that now! Where's the justice of England people brag about so? To bring up anythink a pore woman may say when she's all flurried-like with anger and terror and no time to think! Where's the justice of that, I ask, Miss Halliston?" She was further cautioned against soldiers and sailors.

"It's all the uniforms! And don't you be thinking what fine creatures they are, Miss Halliston. Look at the sol-

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diers now! No sooner do a soldier get a wife and two or three children, and what does 'e do? Goes off to fight Bores or Red Indies or somethink, and as likely as not, gets killed. And sailors is just as bad, what with 'aving a sweetheart in every port, and all. Oh, yes, it's all the uniform. Men being such poor things, women nat'rally prefers 'em a bit 'idden and decorated like, and that makes 'em that vain, you would n't believe!"

She was also warned against the uniformed gentlemen, as being all "foxes in sheep's clothes." And she was never to give a penny to beggars, or they would snatch her purse.

Her promise to limit her charity to the old man with wooden arms at the corner of the street met with triumphant scorn.

"Did n't I know you was as innercent as a new-born babe? 'Is arms ain't wooden! 'Is arms are hid beneath that old coat! Don't tell me! All the beggars without arms and legs 'ave them 'idden away somewhere, and they'd be down with 'em, and snatch your purse, and be off with it before you knew where you was, Miss Halston!"

She paused for breath at that moment; and in the pause, timed by that mirthful imp who waits on staid old Providence, there echoed a terrible crash of breaking china.

"That Norah —" and Mrs. Greaves was gone.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### LONDON AGAIN

**H**ELEN said she thought it would be more convenient for her to board and cook for herself; she would generally take her heavier meals out.

Mrs. Greaves sniffed mournfully; she had heard the tale so often.

"The next step 'll be — 'Oh, Mrs. Greaves, I really find it too fatiguing to walk from my sitting- to my bed-

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room. Can you let me 'ave a little room with a camp bedstead in it? And a smaller room would do, and — er — 'igher up — it's 'ealthier; and really I do *not* believe carpets are 'ealthy, and that's the truth;' and then she'll go — oh, yes, after they've reached the barest, smallest, 'ighest room they always go. And she'll go to some 'orrid cheap place where they'll let 'er 'ave a garret, and she's that innercent and refined she'll never guess the 'orrors she will meet with in 'er bed and furniture; never 'eard of such things most like, would n't know 'em when she saw 'em. Well, genteel or not genteel, I'll warn 'er of the things she'll meet with, before she leaves this ark of refuge!"

Helen received a letter, forwarded from Stanley Hall, from the editor of the *Monthly Literature*, asking her if she had any short story she could submit to him. She had two on hand that she had written some months before. Reading them through before sending them off, she realised afresh how her power to write had left her. The editor accepted one, and regretted that the other was too long for his magazine.

One afternoon — it was a very close, hot afternoon — she was returning from the British Museum, where she had been looking up notes for an article for a children's magazine. She was very tired. She insisted to herself that that was all. She held her head erect; she walked on, facing squarely the hot dusty streets.

What was it Boyne had said to her once? "Oh, the man's a fool! He sits down under the blow; why does n't he walk — run — jump?" The impatience of his voice echoed now with startling reality in her ears.

"Well, I'm walking. The running and jumping would n't be respectable enough with all those narrow, dull eyes staring at me. They might fall out of their heads — and windows are heavy."

Those impatient words of Boyne's ousted all feeling but a great dull ache, as she thought how he could n't run and jump — how he had to sit and wait — and she had been so cruel! so petty and full of herself those hot July days. It was the old pain, the old remorse. If only she had known! She *ought* to have known — there lay the cruel-

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lest sting; she should have guessed, and tried to help him; not let him see that she had noticed how he did not do things. What a friendship hers had been, to fail him at the first hint of trouble! Oh, to help him! to do something for him!

She climbed the seventy-seven stairs that led to her rooms slowly. There was no reason why she should hurry; there never was any reason why she should hurry. Thoughts began to crowd down upon her; she pushed them back strenuously. She was strong enough still to do it, though the silence in which she lived supplied a painfully nourishing soil for such quick-spreading growths. She passed empty rooms on the different floors; their doors swinging forlornly ajar. She went on, up the oil-cloth stairs, up the plain boards. Suddenly she paused, listening. Her breath caught in a quick little laugh of relief, of gladness. She raised her head. From her room there issued a voice singing.

"Bubbles! No one could sing like that but Bubbles! Oh, those Derrys!"

"When morning is breaking,  
Our couches forsaking,  
To greet their awaking,  
With carols we come.

"Buck up, Pip! It's no good unless you sing till you're *bursting* with it!"

"At summer day's nooning,  
When weary lagooning,  
Our mandolins tuning,  
We lazily thrum.

"Now — Dulcie — Pip! —

"Tra la la la la, Tra la la la la!"

"I'm *sure* she must be coming!" Pip's impatient voice broke through the tra-la-la-la's; Pip's dark head appeared round the door; Pip's voice gave a shrill scream of triumphant welcome. "I *knew* she was! Here she is!"

Bubbles and Dulcie shot through the door. "Oh, dear lovely!" Dulcie whispered ecstatically, clinging to Helen.

"Queen of Hearts!" Bubbles exclaimed.

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"The Queen of Hearts just made *tarts*," Pip objected; "how silly you are, Bubbles!"

"Queen of Roses, then. I don't care. Did you hear us singing, Miss Alliston? *Did it sound happy?*"

"Oh, delightfully happy, Bubbles."

"It was dad told us a legend," Dulcie put in eagerly; "it was that if when you go into a person's house for the first time, you sing a happy song it *stops* there —"

"And when you're feeling in the blues," Bubbles pursued, "all of a sudden you hear a bit of the song —"

"It's in the walls, you see," observed Pip, "and the chairs and everything."

"It lingers, dad said," finished Dulcie, "and then when you hear it it makes you feel better."

"I say, Miss Alliston, can you say —"

"Humphrey Hunchback had a Hundred Hedgehogs.  
Had Humphrey Hunchback —"

"Oh, spare me, Bubbles! Perhaps I'll try it after tea!"

"Oh," cried Dulcie, "won't it be *lovely*? There's five of us, and only three chairs. May we sit on the floor, like a picnic?"

"I'm afraid you will have to. Pauline, if I had a hand to spare it should be extended to you."

"They've been at their singing ever since we arrived," observed Pauline; "they've sung every cheerful song they know."

"I believe I can hear the echoes now," Helen said, entering the room; "there's a sort of gaiety somewhere."

"Why have n't you been near us lately?" Pauline demanded.

"I've been so busy writing, or rather, trying to write. Derrys, who'll come with me, and buy some cakes for tea? Pauline, you can sit and think over your sins."

"Oh, don't go and get cakes —"

"I want an excuse to have one or two."

"Do you make your own tea and set your table and all that?" Bubbles queried on the landing.

"Yes, Bubbles."

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"Oh, Gloriana!" He swung a slim leg over the rickety balusters and shot from Helen's view round a curve.

"Bubbles!" Helen ran down the stairs. "Get off! *Bubbles!*"

He awaited her in the narrow hall. She heard a sound, and looked round just in time to see Pip come sliding down.

"Derrys, you'll turn my hair grey! Those balusters might break at any moment."

"Oh, come on," Bubbles besought; "I say, Miss Allis-ton, I think Chelsea buns are the best, don't you? You get such a lot for your money."

"*I* know," interposed Pip, "why, they're a penny each! Ha'penny buns are better than *anything*, and if they're proper ones with plenty of currants, they're awfully good."

They entered a confectioner's. A sour-looking woman stood behind the counter. Helen asked for halfpenny buns. "How many, Miss?"

"Three-penny worth," Helen said.

"Oh!" exclaimed Pip's shocked voice; "you *must n't* get them without looking at them! Show them to us, please," to the woman.

"They're all the same — there is n't any diff'rence in ha'-penny buns," the woman said disagreeably.

"Here they are, Pip," cried Bubbles; "they don't look very curranty, do they?"

Pip peered into the window.

"No, they don't. Have n't you any diff'rent ones?" turning to the woman. "Oh, well, then, I think you ought to let us have three for a penny —"

"*I* know," cut in Bubbles, "have you got any 'pennorths of stale'?"

"Oh, Bubbles —" Helen interposed.

"Oh, they're all right," he assured her cheerfully. "You get twice as much, and it goes further when it's stale. Have n't you got any?" to the woman.

"No, indeed I have n't!"

"Do you mean to say," observed Pip earnestly, "that you sold every cake and bun in the shop yesterday?"

"Do you want any buns or not, Miss?" the woman said

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sharply to Helen; but before she could reply, Bubbles interposed airily.

"No, thank you; we like decent buns, with currants in them. Come on!"

At the door Pip looked back.

"I should n't have *thought* you 'd sell your old things!" she observed in a tone of dire suspicion.

The woman muttered something, but Helen pulled Pip away. She felt ashamed to loiter in the vicinity of that shop, and prepared to hurry on. She looked down lovingly at Dulcie—she was a perfect treasure of a Derry, she thought. Dulcie smiled up at her sweetly. "Bubbles," she said earnestly, "*do* go back, and make a face at her round the door!"

Nothing loath Bubbles ran back, ignoring Helen's voice. Pip and Dulcie followed. It was a quiet street, without much traffic. Helen left the Derrys to their fate, and fled, coward-fashion, round the corner. To her, mingling with the hum of London, came Bubbles' angelic voice lifted in song—

"There is a land where the Grumpies go!  
And this bare land is full of woe!  
They drag you along by your great big toe  
And duck you in the lake of Oh-dear-oh!"

They rejoined Helen, looking horribly delighted with themselves.

"Oh, was n't she cross? She's as red as my tammy shanter!" chuckled Pip, diabolically.

"It was very rude of you all—"

"I'll go with a currant less in one of my buns for a punchment," Bubbles assured her with gay insouciance.

"You would n't be cross with us," insinuated Dulcie, "if only you 'd seen her red-scarlet face."

"I thought, Bubbles," Helen considered herself rather brilliant, "that you were always polite to women."

Bubbles' eyes opened wide. "Did you, honest Injun? Oh, no, I'm not. I'm awfully rude to old grumps like that. I say, Miss Alliston, here's another shop."

Helen stood firm. "You three shall wait outside."

"All right, but we'll get run over, I 'spect;" the cheerful prognostication came from Pip.

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Helen looked up and down the road. "No, you won't; there's hardly any traffic —"

"It's just the kind of quiet road those beastly old smel-  
lers love," observed Bubbles.

"He means motors," Dulcie explained.

"Well, promise me not to leave the pavement, Derrys." They considered.

"I can't," Bubbles objected; "s'pose I saw a lady getting run over?"

Helen considered that a remote possibility, so risked —  
"Well, then, promise you'll leave the pavement for nothing less than that."

"I can't. S'pose it was a baby that got run over?"

Helen pondered.

"We *will* promise," Dulcie cut in earnestly. "Bubbles, you're a loathly serpent!"

"You're a silly little kangaroo then!"

"Oh," interrupted Pip, "let's promise. I'm getting awfully hungry."

"Right you are, my Orange-Pip. We promise, Miss Alliston, honest Injun, not to leave the instincts of this pavement."

Helen entered the confectioner's, and asked for three-penny worth of half-penny buns.

"*Do* look if they've got plenty of currants in them!" came Pip's imploring voice round the door.

"And *do* choose the brown, shiny ones, Miss Alliston," from Dulcie.

"I'm choosing the brownest, shiniest, currantiest buns in the shop," she reassured them.

"Stale goes much further," remarked Bubbles.

Helen looked about for the most delectable cakes for the remaining nine-pence she meant to spend.

In at the door flew Bubbles.

"Miss Alliston, there's a cream puff in the window, and there's flies on it, and they've eaten nearly *half*! You could get it for — for *three farthings*! And it's a two-penny puff!"

"Bubbles, I told you to stay outside."

"Oh, all right. It's just in the corner over there, next to the Bath buns," and he departed.



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"S'pose," said Dulcie, on the way back, "a lady *had* been run over, and s'pose we'd just stood and looked at her, 'cause we'd *promised*, would you have been a murder, Miss Alliston?"

"It's too deep for me, Dulcie."

"Oh," sighed Bubbles, "what jolly tin tacks!" He was gazing longingly in at an ironmonger's window.

Helen, still reckless, innocently thought she would buy him a few.

"Well, Bubbles —" she began.

"Would n't they smash up the old smellers gloriously, Pip?" pursued Bubbles.

Pip nodded. "They've got such beautiful, long points."

"What do you want them for?" Helen inquired, with a sudden suspicion.

"Oh, to help mother cover the chairs with chiffon," Bubbles said, his head on one side.

"Chiffon!" snorted Pip, "cretonia, you mean."

Bubbles tucked his hand beneath Helen's arm.

"It was a fib, you know."

"I had my suspicions," she responded dryly; "but really, Derrys, if you mean that you put tin tacks in the road to burst the tires of motors —"

"They burst dogs!" Bubbles interposed.

"Oh, but most motorists would be horrified at such a thing."

"Scuse me," came from Pip, in ridiculously dignified tones, "but I read the papers. I've read all the letters in the papers about the Soshull Juggy nob."

"They devastigate the country," Dulcie declared in shocked tones.

"What's a fine to bloater-millionaires like them?" quoth Bubbles; "the law should be altered."

"They should be shut up in prison!" declaimed Pip.

"I know!" cried Bubbles. "Every time they run over a dog, the motorman should be tied up with ropes and put in the road and his own motor run over *him*!"

"Put *all* the people that were in the motor — the chaffer too — Bubbles, and run over them all!" amended Pip.

"I hate the chaffer the most," Dulcie observed pensively.

"I *know* he just chaffs and laughs when they run over a poor, lovely dog."

"And it's people, too," pursued Pip, "though they don't matter so much. Poor old ladies can't go for a walk in Hyde Park now, because the motors try to knock her down —"

"And ladies in the country can't ride bikes any more, because the motors fly up behind and run over them," put in Bubbles.

"And all the poor little flowers in the gardens get all covered with dust," said Dulcie sadly.

"And pedissians can't walk in the roads and lanes now, because of the awful smell and the dust the motors leave behind them," said Pip. They were on the door step by then. Helen refrained from advice. She felt a guilty sympathy with them in their bloodthirsty designs.

"Fancy any one," wound up Bubbles, "who can have *horses*, choosing dead old smelly hard motors! It shows they're mad, of course."

The cakes, when unpacked, presented a somewhat crushed appearance, which was due to Bubbles' exuberance of feeling over the motor question.

The cloth was laid, the table set, places on the floor "bagged," in a whirl of eagerness and whole-hearted joy peculiar to Derryland. Pauline sat, oblivious of noise, deep in a story of Helen's that she had found on the table.

She left it with a sigh to come and partake of the cakes.

"Helen, it's splendid. I'd like Jem to see it. When did you write it?"

"A few months ago." Helen smiled at her steadily.

"It's so *happy*! The whole atmosphere of it is so charming. It seems so full of joy—the mere joy of living—it's like the songs of birds after a shower."

"You flatter me, Pauline." Helen bent down, and scanned the plate on Dulcie's knee. "More bread and butter, dear?"

Dulcie tilted back her head against Helen's skirt. "No, thank you. Are n't all the birds just twittering on the trees, waiting to pick up our pieces?"

Helen glanced humourously at the window, but she answered appropriately:

"They sound very hungry, don't they?"

"The grass," quoth Bubbles, "is awful damp. I expect we 'll all have roomy tism."

Helen and Pauline were the only ones who condescended to chairs. The easy-chair and the chair from the bedroom had been waved aside with scorn, and the three Derrys squatted happily on the floor. Sundry bumpings of heads against the table in no wise detracted from their joy.

"Dear me," ejaculated Pip, rubbing her brow, "there's that tiresome trunk of the oak tree again!"

Dulcie's hand clutched Helen's.

"May we wash up after tea?"

"Yes, dear."

"Pip," Pauline said, "why are you examining the furniture so minutely?"

Pip tilted back her head, and regarded Helen earnestly.

"Miss Alliston, is it just over-walked with fleas?"

"Oh, Pip!" ejaculated Bubbles, "you've got no perliteness!"

"I have! It was Hesky said it. She said, 'Those London lodging houses are just over-walked' — no, 'over-run' — which is much worse."

"I don't care! Even David said 'flies,' because he was too perlite to say 'fleas.' He said, 'He spake the word, and there came all manner of flies' —"

"How d' you know he did n't mean flies?"

"He did n't! Who'd mind flies? Fine punchment flies would be!"

Pip was baffled.

"I wish," said Bubbles, dreamily, "I'd been alive then, and a wicked Egyptshun. I do like frogs and grasshoppers. Fancy a heap of frogs hoppin' around in your room."

"You would n't have had any 'less you were Pharaoh," interposed Pip; "it was only in the king's chambers."

"I'd be a king then."

"Your legs would have to grow fatter first, anyway."

"P'raps Pharaoh did n't have fat legs; it does n't say so."

"All kings do," in a final tone. "Look at our king, in the pictures where he's going to play football, with knickers on. His legs are tremenjous!"

Bubbles doubled up a leg, and eyed it pensively.

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"There's plenty of muscle," he said.

"Perhaps wicked kings' legs shrivel, Bubbles, and wither," put in Dulcie, earnestly.

"P'raps they do," Bubbles said, and perked up again.

After tea he said grandly, "We are now goin' to wash up. Will you two female ladies please sit down?"

"I'll help—" Helen began.

But they would not hear of such a thing. So Helen and Pauline sat in the little window and talked.

"Now tell me, Helen, how you're getting on?" Pauline said in a low voice.

Helen looked round the room with a comical expression.

"Well, you can see, can't you?"

Pauline looked round too.

"It's better than Stanley Hall, I should think."

An odd gratitude shone in Helen's eyes.

"Pauline, what a boon you are! Yes, it is."

Pauline nodded.

"It's a pity you won't come to us, though."

"Don't begin on that," Helen entreated.

"Oh, no, I won't. You've a right to please yourself, of course, only—" her little dark face kindled, "always remember there's Derryland waiting for you, Helen."

"It's a good thing to have to remember," Helen said simply.

"You know times have been awful lately. But we none can face the idea of another paying guest, and that's the truth."

"I'm sorry your first experiment gave you such a horror of the species."

Pauline nodded, and looked out of the window.

"On Sunday," she said presently, "we had what Jem calls a regular buster. He got a cheque for five guineas Saturday evening. The Derrys were in bed. He looked up at me. 'You're going to have a buster to-morrow,' he said. 'We'll go and do our marketing now.' Three pounds of that cheque had to go to pay odd little bills; and beyond that—well, Bubbles' pyjamas are getting positively indecent, and Pip and Dulcie need new shoes, and the Cherub and Peggy new socks, and Hesky new dusters and things, and towels, and curtains—oh, all sorts of

things like that—we're horribly shabby. But off we went. As we stood in the hall, down came Bubbles with a confession; but when he caught sight of us ready to go out, his repentance vanished. Well, it's no good—you know how feeble I am with my pyjamaed Bubbles; of course he came with us."

"Did he wait to dress?"

"He put on shoes and stockings, and his long coat and a hat. I tied a petticoat of Pip's on under the coat for warmth. Oh, we had some fun! We bought a couple of ducks, a ham, four pounds of salmon, two pounds of chocolates, two pounds of green gages, some bananas, apples, and chocolate cake—and Jem bought me a lovely bunch of Gloire de Dijon roses, and a bottle of my favourite scent—he insisted. Oh, last Sunday was a glorious day! Jem said, 'Well, I've got my share of pleasure out of "Sir Harry Kingsford" anyway!' So had we all. And since then I've bought *some* of the uninteresting necessary things—" She paused and looked at Helen shrewdly. "You go in for a buster, if you get a cheque, Helen. It does one a world of good. Never mind all the tiresome necessities you need. Just have a good buster, and you'll see how it clears the atmosphere. Moreover, you look as if you need the mere material part of it—you are thin. Don't overdo the loneliness, Helen."

"Oh, my landlady pays me lengthy visits. She's distinctly amusing, and so mournful, she always makes me feel hilarious. Pauline, who pays for breakages?"

Pauline glanced towards the table, and laughed.

"I'll tell you when they've done."

They watched the washers-up in silence awhile.

"Bubbles wanted to bring you a white mouse and a brown one, to keep you company, but I stopped him. And Dulcie had saved up to buy you a yellow chicken—oh!" A cup had slipped from Bubbles' fingers and fallen to the floor.

"It's not hurt, Miss Alliston!" he cried, picking it up.

Helen breathed a sigh of relief. Mrs. Greaves had provided the extra cups and saucers and things needed, and the cup Bubbles had dropped had belonged to the deceased sister with the auburn hair.

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"We *have n't* made any mess, *have* we?" Dulcie asked, sidling up to Helen when the washing-up was done.

"You've managed wonderfully. I've never seen such shining cups and plates before. You're precious little hand-maidens, except Bubbles, and he's a hand-youth, I suppose."

"It's fashionable to have men-servants nowadays, — Swiss and French, and all sorts," observed Bubbles. "I'd only have English!"

When they were going, Dulcie crept up to Helen with a great show of mystery, and put a little paper packet into her hand.

"*Please* don't look at it till we've *quite* gone. I did it all by myself. It's for you — and it's a secret!"

Helen thanked her, and promised to wait. She went downstairs with them to the door.

"Pauline, bring them all next time," she called after them.

She went back up the narrow stairs, smiling.

Her room echoed with Derrysisms; it seemed brighter, more airy. She cut the cotton round the parcel Dulcie had given her, and unwound layer after layer of brown paper, till at length she came to a tiny square of pale blue velvet with a rickety and very crooked "L" embroidered on it in pearl beads. It was so typical of Dulcie. Helen smoothed it lovingly. She remembered a weary little voice once saying to her, "I should think it was that wicked old King John who'vented sewing;" and Pip's energetic response, "No, it was n't! God invented it when He turned Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. Eve had to just sit and make all Adam's trousers and coats, and Cain and Abel's knickers, as well as her own dresses, for a punishment."

All the Derrys disliked needlework. The "L" amused her too. For a moment she was at a loss, then it struck her that "L" stood for "Love." How like Dulcie! She rubbed the soft velvet against her cheek. The pearls scratched it; she smiled, put the velvet down, stood a moment in thought.

"I could! I will! Oh, surely I can write now?"

She sat down, hurriedly got her paper ready, began to

write; her face, determined at first, quickly became absorbed. She was writing, for the third time, a story she had thought out weeks ago. She wrote feverishly. Vaguely, without her realising it, her instinct warned her to seize the moment; her pen flew; sheet after sheet was flung aside, blots were plentiful. The little room grew grey; the dusk deepened; impatiently she dragged the table nearer the window and wrote on. A little breeze, as sweet as if in its coming to her it had kept aloof from London, stole in at the window, and softly fluttered the edges of her paper, stirred the dark waves of her hair. The corners of the room grew grey-black; the shadows widened, spread over the room. Still she wrote, her head bent close to the paper. She could not see the lines, but instinct kept her writing fairly straight. At last she had to rise to light the lamp. She did it impatiently, swiftly, and returned to her writing. The night wore on. With warning regularity the clock in the hall clanged out the hour. Helen had grown to hate its aggressive note. Now she did not hear it. Soon after it had clanged out three slow notes, she flung down her pen. Her back ached; her right wrist ached too; her fingers were cramped, her head felt heavy. She rose with a little triumphant laugh. A sense of power was with her; the shamed feeling of inglorious weakness had left her. She put the sheets together with the smile still on her lips. "I will read you to-morrow! Oh, I have won — I have won!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

## PECUNIARY DIFFICULTIES

THE ability to write that had risen so strongly within her after the Derrys' visit, flickered out again. The story she had written that night was good; it was accepted by the first editor to whom she sent it. She wrote gaily to Boyne, telling her good news. She seized eagerly on the tiniest bit of good news to tell him, on the tiniest

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bit of gaiety. Insensibly her whole life was bounded now by that looking out for trifles to interest him.

In the middle of October she faced the fact that, since she could hardly write now, and since stories anyway were only paid for on publication, she must do something beyond those little articles for the children's magazine.

She was getting perilously near the end of her money. Some day, when various editors saw fit to publish various stories, she would receive a good deal more; but meanwhile she must live.

Deep down at the bottom of her box her novel lay. She had not touched it since that day Boyne had left Stanley Hall. With it lay some pencilled notes he had written for her concerning a difficulty she had been in through ignorance anent army life.

To the finishing of that novel she dared not look forward. Perhaps it would never be finished.

She cudgelled her brains for ways of earning money. She had no intention of starving herself on a bun and milk diet. She recognised the fact that one might break down on that diet, and she did not mean to break down! She clenched her hands at the thought—she must be there, strong and ready—always there—in case she was wanted.

One thing shone out clear and strong,—her inflexible resolve to cling to her present rooms. She wished her head would not ache; it seemed to be always aching nowadays, and it was so difficult to think clearly with that dull ache and throb going on all the time. It was the heat, of course. And it was the heat that made it so difficult to swallow one's food—that horribly necessary and tiresome food. And the heat made one so tired.

She was walking up Gilroy Street. She glanced along it—up at the houses—it was all so dull, so dingy, so terribly unbeautiful. A horror crept upon her. Would she grow like that—living as she was—her life narrowed by the need to make money?

“Put into you good and gracious and salubrious things, and somehow or other they shall sweeten your blood, making it perfumed, ichorian.”

The words flashed into her mind and hurt her. “I have



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no time for the good and gracious and salubrious things—" an unusual self-pity crept upon her; the tears thronged her eyes. "All my time I am keeping thoughts at bay, and — trying to make money. If he — should come back, he will find me low, sordid —"

She stood in her room and looked round. In her ears echoed Bubbles' voice —

"When morning is breaking,  
Our couches forsaking —"

Her momentary self-pity fled abashed. She laughed uncertainly.

"Just because you can't 'sleep o' nights!' That's all it is. Out you go and get something 'good and gracious and salubrious' into you somehow."

Tired as she was, she turned determinedly, and went down the stairs. She meant to go to Hyde Park, but it was too far. She stopped outside a florist's, and looked in longingly. The window was full of pink roses, pink carnations, pink oleanders—all pink. She knew that this was not the sort of florist's for any one with a diminishing principal to venture into. She drank in their beauty, longing so for a few, that she doubted whether envy would not spoil the goodness and graciousness and salubriousness of the thing she was putting into her. A fussy little man came out of the shop carrying an enormous bunch of pink roses. She eyed him thoughtfully. "You're a nothingy sort of little man, who's always in a fuss about your dinner or your train, or something, but—I wish you had bought those roses for me."

The little man hurried up the street, running; and as he ran he dropped one of the pink roses. She took a step forward, then hesitated. He turned the corner and vanished from her sight.

"Oh!" she gave a little laugh, a quick glance round, and sauntered carelessly towards the rose, a beautiful pale thing lying there in the dust of the pavement, long-stemmed, fragrant. She picked it up and walked on.

"I have descended very low. I'm a thief. It's all very well to say I could n't have caught him—that he had

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plenty and would never miss it. I did n't try to catch him, and I don't care in the least if he does miss it. You're mine now, you beautiful thing, with your satiny petals and your tea-rose scent. If I've descended to stealing, it shows my zeal after a 'good and gracious and salubrious thing.' I wonder what Miss Flickers would say to my picking things up in the street? That's pretty low, apart from the moral aspect altogether. But I could n't have let you lie there and die and be trampled under foot, and all your sweetness crushed out of you, and your beauty spoilt, could I? I am getting on. Soon I shall arrive at the conviction that I've done a noble thing — oh, it's all because you're so sweet."

She put the rose into the slender Venetian vase that Pauline had given her; and it glowed, pink and palely sweet, in the small room.

She had a letter from Lilian that evening telling her that she and Augustus were going abroad. She wanted Helen to come to the flat on Tuesday so that they could bid her good-bye.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### BUBBLES PAYS A "BUSINESS" VISIT

THE weather had turned suddenly cold and wet. Morning after morning she looked out on dripping roofs, on drenched articles of clothing hanging dejectedly from dilapidated lines. She never solved the riddle why the clothes were not taken indoors while the rain lasted. In the front mud confronted her, liquid mud.

One day Bubbles walked into her room.

"How-do-you-do; I've come on business." He eyed her gravely.

"Bubbles! Are you alone, dear?"

He looked hurt.

"Yes," he said coldly.

She hesitated. She guessed he must have taken French leave — but it was so good to have him there!

He laid his hat down on a chair, and began to unbutton his coat. He had on no gloves, and his little stiff pink fingers were too much for her.

"Let me, Bubbles!" She was beside him. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you — are you not going to shake hands, Bubbles?"

"I forgot! I beg your pardon!" he ejaculated in stricken tones; "you see, I was thinkin' business," he explained earnestly.

"Why did n't you put on gloves, dear?"

"I could n't find them."

She replenished the fire recklessly.

"Come and get warm."

She eyed him curiously as he moved towards the fireplace.

"Why are you walking lame, Bubbles?"

"I'll 'splain after," mysteriously.

"Bubbles," there was an apologetic note in her voice, "does your mother know you are here?"

He stiffened. "I'm not a baby. I had business with you, so I came."

"But don't you see they will be anxious, dear?"

"It does n't matter."

"I'll just send a telegram."

"Why?"

"Oh, Bubbles, don't be cross. You know I must."

His face cleared suddenly. His dignity vanished.

"All right, Queen of Beauty! I'll take it."

"But your lameness —"

"I don't mind," heroically.

"We'll go together."

Out in the street she said, "May I hold your arm, Bubbles — dear little Bubbles?"

She held his shoulder. "It's good to have an arm to hold," she laughed, in a satisfied tone.

The telegram despatched, they returned to Gilroy Street.

"You found your way here all right?" Helen conjectured diffidently.

"Oh, yes. I 'scorted a lady too."

"How was that?"

"She was in my carriage, you see," he explained, "and

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when we stopped at a station I asked her if I had to get out, and she said, 'Not at this station,' and she looked at me a good deal, and she said she was goin' there too, and she 'd like to come with me, so I 'scorted her, you see, right to the shop at the next corner to this one. I told her I was comin' to see you on business — awful 'portant business, and she said, 'I'm so glad I met you.' Was n't that awful nice of her? And I said, 'I return the compellment,' and then she came to the shop, and I asked her if she was goin' back to-day, because if she felt nervous I'd be pleased to 'scort her, and she said she was n't. She asked a lot of questions about what I was goin' to do, and when I was goin' back, but she was very nice, and when she laughed her teeth were trimmed with gold."

He sat gazing into the fire. He finished the last piece of the bread and butter Helen had given him, then he observed gravely, "Shall we do our business now, Miss Alliston?"

"Yes, Bubbles."

From a pocket he took a piece of paper and a pencil. He put them down on the table, then he bent and began to undo his boots.

"I'll help," she suggested; but he waved her aside peremptorily.

"Once — when dad had cut his hand — awful bad," he was wrestling with the knot of his lace, "he could n't do up his boots — and mums wanted to do them — and dad said, 'Bubbles, come and do them *somehow* — I'd rather wait an hour, than let your mother do them.' Ladies," triumphantly, as the knot was vanquished, "must n't do up men's boots, you see."

Both boots, it appeared, must come off, and then both stockings too.

"It's money, you see," Bubbles explained; "they always used to hide State dockments and money in their boots. Will your mind bein' ready to stop it rollin' a long way?"

He peeled a stocking off, and Helen clutched the rolling pennies, half pennies, farthings, and sixpences.

The other stocking off also, Bubbles helped collect the coins that had escaped her. He piled the money up into neat little heaps on the table beside the paper. His eyes

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were shining, his cheeks flushed. He sat down. "Now—" he began, but she interrupted, "Oh, poor little toes!"

He looked down impatiently at his rubbed and reddened feet.

"The money must have hurt terribly, Bubbles!"

"It did a little. When a penny got on there," he pointed to his red ankle bone, "it hurt rather. Please sit down."

She was examining the angry red patches, but she obeyed him, and sat down opposite in the chintz-covered chair. She did not even suggest the advisability of his donning stockings and boots before beginning the business.

The sight of the money had made her uneasy. She had a foreboding now of the nature of the business.

Bubbles was very solemn.

"You know," he began, "you should always have business in black and white, Miss Alliston."

"Yes," meekly.

"So I've wrote it all down;" he held out the paper to her, a gleam of pride struggling through the solemnity.

"It's all in black and white, you see."

Helen took the paper, and read:

	£.	s.	d.
1 Lofe . . . . .	0	0	3
6 Sossages . . . . .	0	1	0
4 rashers . . . . .	0	0	5
3 eggs . . . . .	0	0	5½
rice . . . . .	0	0	1
Marmylad . . . . .	0	0	5
Shurbet . . . . .	0	0	3
2 hapeny buns . . . . .	0	0	1
one jam tart . . . . .	0	0	1
	0	3	0½

"You see," Bubbles explained, "that's for one week. You see, there's a lot of slices in a loaf, and you did n't eat a lot ever, so I thought one loaf a week would be anuff, and sausages are the cheapest things for dinner. I asked mums about meat and ducks and things, but they're all dearer than sausages. You can get six sausages for a shillin'—that's one for every day except Sunday, and Sunday's a treat day, so I put two halfpenny buns and a penny jam tart for your dinner. And four rashers of bacon

## BUBBLES PAYS A "BUSINESS" VISIT

would cost fivepence, and three eggs fivepence farthin' — that's for your breakfasts, you see. And I asked mums and Hesky about puddin's, and nothin' 's so cheap as rice — it's fourpence for a pound, and I said, 'Mums, how long would a pound last one lady for a little puddin' every day?' I didn't *tell*, you see. And mums said, 'Let me see — three weeks, I should say.' But I put a penny a week case you wanted second helps sometimes. And I put a whole pot of marmylade, so's you could have some with the rice for a treat sometimes — on Sundays, and days like that. And you see marmylade's cheaper than butter, and ever so much nicer, so I've put it instead of any butter, and it's cheaper than jam too, mostly. And the sherberts instead of tea. Tea's awful dear, and sherbert's the cheapest I could think of, and I'd make it for you. You only need a spoonful for a whole glass of water. You *do* think they're nice things, don't you?"

"Charming," she said, "but —"

"And," he pointed a triumphant little finger to the neat piles of money, "there's a five shillin' bit, and a two-shillin' bit, and forty-three farthin's, and seven pennies, and a shillin', and thirteen halfpennies!"

"Good gracious! Why, what riches, Bubbles!"

His voice rose higher and higher in his excitement; his businesslike dignity had deserted him.

"It comes to ten shillin's and a penny and a farthin'," he said breathlessly. "I've done it over and over again, and you only come to three shillin's and a farthin', so you can stay for *ages*, can't you?"

"Oh, Bubbles, dear —" cowardlike she put off the evil moment, — "is all that money yours?"

He nodded.

"Every bit! Have n't I got a lot? And no one knows! Oh!" Bubbles slipped from his chair, and carefully moving the table to one side, turned a somersault. As it was, his foot hit the window-pane, but being bare, it did no harm.

Right side up, he regarded Helen comically. "That was a near shave, oh, my Lady!"

"It was, oh, my Bubbles!"

"When will you come? I'll help you pack now, and we'll go back to tea, won't we?"

"Bubbles, what made you think of this?"

"You see, mums 'splained how you would n't come for nothin', because of your food costin' money and all that—"

"Oh, Bubbles, Bubbles, I can't take it, dear!"

He had just been about to start another somersault. He stopped and stared at her. He came close and looked up into her face. "You must! A person has to accept a present when another person gives it her—" this with immense dignity.

She was silent.

Bubbles drew a deep breath. "Do you know," he said, "you did it so well I just thought you meant it for a quarter-minute! When we gave Hesky a pin-cushion on her birthday she said, 'Lor', now, I could n't think of acceptin' anythin' so grand as that!' and she wiped her hands on her apron before she'd touch it!" He eyed the neat little piles of money lovingly. "Pip helped me with the black-and-white part," he said honestly. "You see, all that 'rithmetic was rather difficult, but she did n't know what it was for. I said, 'Pip, if eggs are a penny and three farthin's each, how much would it cost to buy three?' And Pip said, 'What do you want to know for?' and I said, 'Reasons of state!' and she did n't ask any more. That's what we always say, you know. Please will you begin to pack now? Oh, Eureka, is n't it glorious? Do you think you could climb over the wall, Miss Alliston, and get in at the corner window? It's rather small, but then you'd creep upstairs and undress and just walk into tea! Oh!" He turned to perform another somersault, but she stayed him. And then she began her explanations, consolations, entreatings. He refused to believe her at first, but at last he turned and went back to his chair. He picked up his stockings and began putting them on in silence.

"Bubbles, don't you understand?" she pleaded.

Coldly his polite little voice responded, "Yes, thank you," and he went on pulling on a stocking.

She thought it wiser to change the subject. "Bubbles, we'll go somewhere, shall we? Would you like," recklessly, "to go to the Zoo again?"

"I preffer to go home, thank you."

She watched the small figure wrestling with the boots,

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then she went and knelt beside his chair. Looking up at him so, she caught by the firelight the glint of a mist in his eyes. She put her arms about him. "Oh, Bubbles, don't be cross with me! Should n't a gentleman always let a lady have her way?"

"I, —" there was a sudden little desperate quiver in his voice, — "I'm not a gentleman now — I'm just a man!"

"If you knew how miserable you are making me," her soft voice murmured; "if you only knew that, Bubbles, you would forgive me."

There was a silence.

"I slid down the bal'sters twenty times in one minute and a quarter — Pip timed me — when Aunt Priscilla sent me that five-shillin' bit for a birthday present," he murmured in a sad little voice.

Her arms tightened about him.

"Do you hate me now, Bubbles?"

"No; but you're not very nice, are you?"

"No, I'm horrid — horrid!"

He sighed heavily. Then he turned his head and looked into her face. He sighed again. "If you can't help it, I — I won't think you're *very* nasty," he said.

"Bubbles, there is a reason — dear, I — I can't quite tell you, but — I want to stay here just now —"

"Is it a sad reason?" he asked intuitively.

"Yes, Bubbles," she whispered. "I am telling you because I want you to understand, and I know you won't talk about it —"

"Could you just tell me the *sort* of reason it is?"

"It's the sort of reason," she said slowly, "that — that makes you want to be alone. Bubbles —"

He sat upright.

"Will you please shake hands?"

She felt a ridiculously deep joy as she clasped the small hand in hers.

Bubbles looked up into her face earnestly. "I won't *never* think you're a bit nasty! I think you're *very* nice. And I won't *never* talk a single, one, word about it."

"Thank you, Bubbles," she said.



CHAPTER XXIX

HELEN FINDS SOME PUPILS

HELEN had found, with the help of her landlady, two little girls in need of her services as a teacher of music. Their mother was a friend of Mrs. Greaves. With her customary optimistic outlook on life that lady warned Helen, "In course they 're *foreigners*, Miss Halliston, and I always do say you never can tell what a *foreigner* 'll be up to next!"

However, Helen found a stout, comfortable German lady, who was most amiable, and two little pig-tailed damsels with an edifying, if stolid, wish to learn the piano. That piano gave her a foretaste of the future lessons. It had a grass-green fluted silk back, adorned with two green tassels, and the treble notes were so excruciatingly sharp that they made her feel she was cruel to draw forth such agonised shrieks. For the rest — "A vew of ze baser notes haf gone," Frau Müller informed her, "but all ze leetle squeaks are zere!"

They certainly were.

That evening she wrote to Boyne. She did not mention her pupils. She intended that he should think she was in affluent circumstances, and pupils did not spell affluence.

She had had an invitation from Marian, and had been, the day before, to see her. She seized on her visit as something light and gay to tell him.

"Yesterday I went to see Marian — I beg her pardon — Mrs. Henry Walker. I had been invited to tea. I arrived at a quarter to four. It's such a queer little cardboardy sort of doll's house, in a row of villas, every little house the same as its little neighbour, and all their little eyes peeping down at the passers-by with a gossiping sort of expression — you know the kind. While I stood waiting to be admitted, I could n't help thinking of a wicked rhyme of the Derrys':

"A little old lady so fat, fat, fat  
Knocked at a little door, t'rat, t'rat, t'rat!  
And she got stuck in the jamb, jamb, jamb,  
And what d'you think she said? Why, dam — son jam!"

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"I did n't get stuck, but I can't help wondering how Henry's mother-in-law will manage in that wee porch, when she forgives and comes to see them, as there seems every prospect of her doing very shortly. And while I still waited there came a wail from within — 'Oh, ma'am, I fergot to light the droring-room fire!'

"Whispers followed, then the door was opened by a diminutive maid with a dress to her ankles, her hair screwed into a knob, and topped by an overpowering cap. And oh, the odour of onions that came from the kitchen! I hope I did n't gasp visibly. In some way I scared the poor little maid out of the few wits she had. When I asked for Mrs. Walker, she backed, open-mouthed, against the wall. I construed her action into an invitation to enter, so squeezed in, and backed against the opposite wall, so that she should be able to shut the door. Then she stretched out an arm, without moving from the door-mat, and opened a door. I walked in. That was the dining-room — Well, imagine a house furnished by Marian, and you will get an idea of it all. She told me with blushing pride that Henry had such faith in her taste, and left it all to her! Oh, the wall-papers! The carpets! The pictures! And worst of all — oh, the family photographs! There is, apparently, no end to them. The furniture in the drawing-room consists chiefly of rickety bamboo tables and stands, and a poor little hot piano, its back swathed in silk, its top loaded with vases and family photographs, its keys covered with a crewel-worked cloth. And the legs of every available thing are tied about with pink and green bows of silk. But Marian is deliciously happy. She really overflowed with kindness and hospitality and pride. I was shown everything, down to the very drawers in which 'Henry' keeps his things, and the very razors he uses to shave himself! But oh, I was glad you were n't there! It was a trial to my poor risible muscles even alone, more especially when the just-lit drawing-room fire smoked, and tickled my throat till I felt I could n't live another moment without a cough. But a cough would have been so cruel. I am a Spartan. I sat and talked with the tears in my eyes, and a smile upon my lips. I forgot to tell you that both dining- and drawing-room were decorated with

bowls and vases of huge terra cotta, yellow, mauve, and pink artificial chrysanthemums!

"I was made to take off my coat and hat. I was informed that 'Henry' was going to get home at a quarter to six, as a special honour, and tea was to be at six.

"Then we retired to the smoky drawing-room, and I was shown family photographs — and family photographs — and still family photographs. I was told that Henry's hair is still as silky as it was when he was a baby, and was called upon to admire him as a scarf-clad baby seated on a rock by the seashore with ferns and palms sprouting about him. His silky hair had all been used to make one large roll on top of his large head, and had left an enormous brow bare and cold. I hope I duly admired him, and all the brothers and sisters-in-law, and their wives and husbands and children; and uncles and aunts and their wives and husbands and children — and so on. But as we sat there, there crept, stronger and stronger, into the room that odour of onions. I was horrified. But presently Marian gave a good honest sniff, and said she, 'Did you notice the onions when you came in? I was going to tell Adelaide to shut the kitchen door, but I do think a smell like that is such a welcome, don't you?'

"I murmured something about it's certainly being a 'strong' welcome, and she was satisfied.

"Satisfaction is writ large all over her. She is so proud of her home, of her 'Henry,' whose mother, by the way, has almost strung herself up to the self-sacrificing pitch of cutting in twain a certain beautiful baby-curl of Henry's in her possession, and giving one-half to Marian.

"Oh, how horrid I am! But it is all so funny. Marian told me how glad she was she had followed the 'dictums of her heart.' Her husband really is a kind little man. His greeting of Marian was embarrassing apparently only to *me*! We had high tea at six. Curry, and steak, and onions! Do imagine it. I chose curry in despair, because the steak was so thick and pink; but curry and tea! — After tea we played cards. They wouldn't let me go. Before I did go they gave me wine and cake. They could n't have been kinder. And Henry escorted me home — "

## HELEN FINDS SOME PUPILS

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She prodded her blotting-paper thoughtfully, searching her brain for anything else cheerful.

"What do you think of this for etiquette? I found it in a little old mouldy book that I invested in for twopence at a second-hand book shop in Charing Cross Road:

"'Clause in the "Sunday Observance Act of Charles II." Be it decreed, that all women, of whatever age, rank, profession, or degree, whether virgins, maids, or widows, that shall from and after the passing of this Act impose upon and betray into matrimony any of his Majesty's male subjects, by scents, paints, cosmetics, washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high-heeled shoes, or bolstered hips, shall incur the penalty of the law now in force against witch-craft, sorcery, and such like demeanours, and that the marriage on condition shall stand null and void.' It opens up tragic pictures, does n't it? Beautiful pictures for Punch."

She paused, pen in hand; her eyes, shadowed with painful thought, looked unseeingly at the little lamp. Then slowly her pen wrote:

"It is cold and wet here. What sort of weather are you having? Are you able to get out much, or are the roads and lanes too bad?"

She paused again. These bald little sentences meant so much — by such roundabout means she sometimes got a hint of his state. She added:

"You have never told me if the Norfolk air makes you as ravenous as it is credited with making others?"

A quizzical little smile touched her lips. "I hope it is credited with it!"

Then she flung down her pen. She dared trust it no longer in her hand. Words, burning words, ran to its very tip — words telling him to take care of himself — words asking him how he was.

She rose and paced the room.

"I *won't* worry him with my woman's fuss! I won't! I won't!"

She pushed up her hair from her brow with both hands; it was an infinitely weary gesture. She took out her watch — only half-past eight! Yet she did not want the night to come — the nights were so long —

She remembered how once in some childish illness she had not been able to sleep, and how the terrors of the mysterious dark had assailed her. She remembered how the Jannies — she had always thought of them as Jannies — had slipped about the room — long, stealthy, misty forms, writhing past her bed — almost soundless, yet not quite. And how sometimes at the first grey streak of dawn she had felt the coldness of their swift vanishing upon her cheeks.

She smiled now at that forlorn little creature; but how she would welcome back those old terrifying Jannies, if they would come instead of the night-creatures that menaced her now!

## CHAPTER XXX

### "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

A SUDDEN horror of the loneliness of her rooms, where thought pressed so heavy a hand upon her brow, decided her to take a short trip into Derryland. She started early one bright morning, and reached the "Red Cottage" without coming across any stray Derrys. No brown or yellow or flaxen heads hung from the windows. It was a most decorous "Red Cottage." She knocked and waited. There was a dead silence; she began to fear they were all out. A musical voice suddenly vented deep feeling in an ejaculation — "Dam — son jam!" and she knew that Bubbles, at any rate, was within.

"I'll go!" exclaimed another voice; "I'll say we're all engaged!"

This was Pip. Footsteps came towards the door, then there was a scuffle, as Pip was very evidently hauled back.

"Oh, Mummie, *don't* go! Don't let's take any notice," from Dulcie.

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

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A chuckle from Peggy. "And the ole thing will just ring and ring, and knock and knock, and then glo away!"

Close to the crack of the door a business-like voice — "Growl, Stentor! Seize it!" proclaimed Bunny's vicinity.

Then the door was opened by Pauline; quick as thought she drew it almost to.

"I am very sorry, but I really have n't time to see visitors to-day —" she began.

"Bravo, Mums!" came an appreciative whisper from the hall.

"We are all so busy —" she pursued.

"And the dust is chokin'!" from the hall, in a loud voice.

"Oh, *frustratingly* chokin'!"

"And Stentor's cross!"

"Oh, yes! Most likely he'd go for a visitor just now!"

"Most likely *gobble them up!*"

Pauline resumed clearly, "There, you hear, Miss Alliston!"

Squeals rent the air. The door was flung back, and a squad of queer, turbaned Derrys hurled themselves through it, Stentor in its midst.

"*That's* why Stentor was wagging his tail with his nose against the door!"

"Oh, Mums, we'll pay you out!"

"Oh, you *could* n't have come on a betterer day!"

"It's a '*Clearance Day*'!"

Helen, her arms encircling indiscriminately flaxen, yellow, and brown heads, and a great fawn one, managed to work her way into the chaotic hall. Over the heads she saw the floor strewn with rubbish. Broken boxes and boxlids, some overflowing, some empty; broken toys, papers, books, shoes, boots, gloves, vases, stuffs, dolls, clothes.

Her eyes met Pauline's. Pauline smiled ruefully: "You would n't think we have a grand '*Clearance Day*' twice a year, would you? We're such awful people for collecting rubbish somehow."

"We give all the rubbish to a poor old man with a glass eye," Dulcie said earnestly.

"His name's Mr. Raggybone," supplemented Peggy in all good faith.

"You know," Pauline suggested, "we'll put it all aside, if you like."

Consternation swept over the Derrys' faces. From the chorus of eager explanation that followed, Helen gathered that it was "the bestest day in the year," that they had no proper dinner, but just "bits up in the theatre," and that they "made a lovely mess."

Helen cut in at that — "Oh, splendid! I'll help make a mess, Derry!"

She left them capering with joy, and went upstairs with Pauline to take her coat and hat off.

"I want to show you the new ewer I bought for your room," Pauline said; "you remember yours had a bit out of its lip? Well, the jug in Bubbles' and Bunny's room has been cracked for a long while, and one day it got hopelessly smashed — beyond even seccotine — it was acting as a helmet, I believe; so I carted yours up there, and got this one at a china sale — amongst the odd jugs, you know. Does n't it match well?"

"Beautifully. I like its shape, too."

"That's because it's a real good one. But I got it for two and elevenpence, three farthings. I had made up my mind to give four shillings — minus the farthing, of course — so I saved a shilling."

Helen, taking off her hat, looked in the mirror at the little dark, triumphant face beside her.

"Did you put the shilling in the bank?" she asked.

"N—no. Helen, may I try that hat on?"

"Tell me what you did with that shilling first."

"Why, I'd been in a grump that morning. Oh, my head ached rather, and an idiot of an editor had refused an article of Jem's that he had set special hopes on, and then Peggy upset her porridge all over the place, and — oh, things like that. So I just went straight home, and took all those Derrys, down to my cherubic Cherub himself, for a fourpenny omnibus ride. Twopence there and twopence back, you know."

"Seven fours are twenty-eight — two and fourpence. I see."

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

"Since when have you grown so practical, my dear?" she picked up Helen's hat. "I atoned for my grumps, anyway. The Derrys on top of an omnibus! — even to me —!"

"I can imagine it."

"Well, you *may* — as you're an author; but I doubt it. Don't I look a fright in your hat?" twisting her head about like a bird; "and you looked so charming in it. Your things are always Helen-things."

"Miss Alliston, we'll be all cleared up if you don't come!" Bubbles' voice rang up the stairs.

"He's optimistic," Pauline observed, tucking her hand into Helen's arm.

"Mum," Bubbles appeared in the open door, "I've come to fetch Miss Alliston a pinny and a dust-turban."

"Oh, dear, where are we to rake up another turban?" ejaculated Pauline.

"It must be a *silk* one," came Dulcie's little pipe from the stairs.

"I know!" Bubbles cut a caper of exuberant joy.

"Why, Mums, Uncle Owen's hankie!"

"Oh!" Dulcie's whisper was awe-struck. "Oh, how *beautiful*!"

"Why, yes, Bubbles! Helen, we'll make you into an Eastern Princess. Where did I put that hankie now?"

"It's in the 'Mistletoe Bough,'" Bubbles volunteered. "You put all the Indian things he sent there, Mums."

Helen followed them down into the morning-room, and watched with interest the ransacking of the huge old oaken chest. The handkerchief was extricated at last. It was a beautiful thing, a gorgeous thing, with brilliant colours softly blended into a harmonious whole.

Helen protested. "The dust, Pauline! I don't feel worthy —"

"Go on, Mums! Tie it on her head!" The Derrys danced round. "Oh," when Pauline had done her work, "now we'll greet you!" They stood and bowed before her, — "Salaam, Princess Sahib!"

"Salaam, Mr. Bubbles Sahib. Salaam, Miss Pip Sahib," gravely she went through her greetings. Then the Derrys helter-skeltered into the hall. Helen was further



equipped in a cooking apron of Pauline's. She took her seat on the lowest stair. "Some one give me something to clear."

"Oh, *will* you help me clear my 'treasure-box'?" Dulcie besought her.

"Yes, come along."

Dulcie staggered across to her beneath a huge, dilapidated, green cardboard box, strewing the floor with escaping treasures as she came. She laid it down before the stairs, snuggled up close to Helen, and began to show and explain her treasures.

"We have two heaps, you see, — one for rubbish, and one for things we want to keep."

"That's a good way. We'll start with that old bit of paper for the rubbish heap, shall we?"

"Oh, *no!* That's the first — the *very* first thing — the Cherub ever drewed," eyeing the scribble admiringly. "We'll put that on the treasure heap."

"Very well."

Dulcie pulled a worn little piece of red plush from the box.

"It used to be a *dear* little hood; it b'longed to that sweet Ursula Rosy-mund."

Helen waited to see which heap it would grace.

Dulcie, with a final pat, laid it on top of the Cherub's first artistic effort.

And Helen began to have a glimmering of understanding concerning the amount of rubbish that collected in the "Red Cottage," in spite of the half-yearly clearances.

Pauline, rewrapped in her turban, called down the stairs.

"Derrys, I *may* throw away that awful old rocking-chair now, may n't I?"

A chorus of "Noes" answered her.

"But you can't sit in it —"

Bubbles sprang up the stairs.

"It's our gondola, Mums, and a swish-back, and a horse, and a swan — oh, *heaps* of things!"

Helen looked up at Pauline and laughed.

"The wicked effects of the stage," Pauline said, and disappeared.

## “THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT”

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Stentor brought a doll to Helen and laid it at her feet.

“Oh, Stentor!” Dulcie exclaimed; “naughty boy!”

Stentor wagged his tail ingratiatingly, and waved a conciliatory paw in the air. Helen seized the paw.

“He has n’t hurt it, Dulcie. Stentor, I wish you were mine;” she hugged his head up to her. “I’d give you all the dolls in all the toy shops, if you looked at me like that.”

“There’s a man who comes here to dinner sometimes — I forget his name — and he said he’d give dad fifty pounds for him, but we would never, *never* sell him,” Dulcie said.

Stentor suddenly sprawled on his back and kicked. Most of the Derrys left their clearing to fling themselves down beside him.

“He just wants a romp,” Dulcie exclaimed, burrowing her head into Helen’s side, “and then he’ll begin running all about.”

Helen watched the romp contentedly. Stentor growled ferociously, opened his huge mouth at stray hands and feet, kicked, then sprang up and started tearing about the hall, pursued delightedly by the Derrys. Finally he thundered upstairs with them at his heels.

Helen looked round at the deserted hall; no one was in it now but Dulcie and herself, and the treasures were scattered in hopeless confusion.

“Mrs. Cavendish was here one day when he played like that, and she was *frightened!*” Dulcie said, with a gleeful laugh; “she was, *really*, and so we made him growl and roar — and she thought he meant it, and she got up and went away in *such* a hurry. He sounds quite ’pletely different when he’s angry, does n’t he?”

“Oh, yes. Dulcie, he has scattered your treasures rather in his scramble over you to the stairs, has n’t he?”

“Oh, I don’t mind. Don’t you think that’s *pretty?*” She picked up a waxen leg: “It b’longed to poor Ruth;” she deposited it neatly on her treasure heap; “and this b’longed to her too,” holding up a torn bronze shoe; “oh, love dear, it’s just like little bits of your hair, is n’t it?”

Helen laughed. “I don’t think so, dear.”

“Yes, it is, it’s like bits where it dents out — oh, here comes Stentor — he’ll knock us down, I ’spect.”

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Stentor flung himself down the stairs, lay down on the door-mat, put his head on his paws, and eyed them with a sad solemnity.

"Oh, you hypocrite," Helen shook her head at him.

"We're going to get bread and sugar!" shrilled Pip, sliding down the balusters; "mums says we may. Come on, Miss Alliston!"

Helen, feeding Stentor surreptitiously with her slice of bread and brown sugar, hoped she was not spoiling his beautiful white teeth. The Derrys, squatting around, munched delightedly, and the clearing seemed in indefinite abeyance. By dinner-time the hall was a little more laden, through treasures being unearthed from boxes, and that was all. Helen began to wonder *when* the clearing began?

The rooms were littered too, more or less. Pauline laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "*I don't know what to do with the things. Are you going to have a real clearance luncheon, Helen?*"

"You insult me by the question, Pauline."

They trooped into the kitchen.

"Hurry up, Mums! Oh, I can smell potatoes-in-their-jackets!"

"You can, O Derrys of the discerning noses! Also, gingerbread, also bread and raspberry jam. There's the menu for you, Helen."

"Must I choose what I will have?"

"Oh, *dear!* You have them *all*," squeaked Dulcie in an ecstasy.

"But only one plate," Pip put in; "clearance dinners never have more than one plate each. Come on," — she had captured her portion, — "up to the Theatre!"

They trooped upstairs to the big attic, each carrying a portion. Once there the Derrys proceeded to demolish their potatoes. Helen wondered, as she looked at the various attitudes chosen, whether they were conducive to the process of digestion. Suddenly a whispering started. "Yes, we will!" "Which?" "Oh, 'The Faithful Knight.'"

"'Cause of the *food*, you see" — fragments came to Helen.

"They're going to act something," Pauline said.

"Miss Alliston, will you be audience with Mums, if we act a tragedy?" Bubbles asked.

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

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"I shall be most pleased."

"You must go away while we get ready," Pip said. "Bubs, we'll give Miss Alliston the caste now, won't we?"

"Oh, yes, where is it?"

"I don't know. Let's look."

They found it at last and Helen, Pauline, and the Cherub were banished. They sat on the stairs and studied the programme given to them.

### THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT

A Tragidy in One Act.

Composed by the Derrys.

Dramatis Personny.

The Knight — James Lucien Graham Derrington.

His True Love — Katherine Dulcie Derrington.

The wicked King Oscar — Stephen Graham Derrington.

His sister Sophia — Philippa Maude Derrington.

Maid of Honour — Margaret Derrington.

#### SCEEN I.

A Wood.

#### SCEEN II.

A Dugone in the King's Palace.

"It sounds promising," Helen said.

"Oh, it's grand. You may scoff, but you wait and see if you don't get the grips in your throat before it's done. When they acted it before, Hesky was in the audience, and she was so overcome she had to retire. She made custards and baked apples for the Derrys' supper that night — it's their favourite mixture — and when I wanted to know *why*, she sniffed and snuffled — 'Oh, it is n't for all the others, it's for master Bubbles really,' she said and she added mysteriously, 'we'd best feed him up, ma'am, oh, we'd best look after him!' She would n't say more, but I knew what she meant. Bubbles lived in clover for half a day,

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then his naughtiness reassured her, and we heard no more of 'feeding him up and looking after him.' "

"It was hard on Bubbles."

Pauline laughed.

"Hesky's gone to see her husband to-day. She goes once a quarter — always — to see that his sister is looking after him properly, and to buy him any new clothes he may need."

"She's a model wife," Helen said.

The door was opened by Peggy, her chubby cheeks dented with the dimples of smiles sternly suppressed.

"The doors are open," she announced, and they went in.

Their eyes were directed at once to the stage by the brilliant footlights (a row of odds and ends of candles and two night-lights stuck on a long plank). Behind the footlights the wood lay, silent and deserted. The stretch of green sward (the old tablecloth from the morning-room, was dotted here and there with flowers (from old hats of Pauline's). To the right there was a grassy bank (pillows beneath the carpet) on which violets grew. To the left vague, green distances stretched away (an old screen covered with newspapers painted green). The wind sang and whistled, rose and fell in the wood (Pip and Bunny behind the scenes).

From the green distance the Knight came hurrying (Bubbles, arrayed in Johnson, with a golden crown upon his head, and *the* sword in his hand, coming round the screen).

Knight. "Is she here? Ah, my sweet love, methought I had perchance kept thee waiting. The wicked King put obstickles in my way. But, love — ah, love, come to me!"

Enter Rosamunda, his lady-love (Dulcie in a white night-gown of Pauline's, an old blue sash draped about her waist).

Rosamunda. "I come, Sir Knight!"

The Knight (turning and seeing her — holding out his arms). "My sweet Rosamunda! So you have kept our trust" (presumably "tryst"), "yet danger lurks," looking around with fearsome glances and rattling the sword; "but with me thou need not fear."

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

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Rosamunda. "I do not fear, my own Knight, but I have much to tell thee."

The Knight. "Let us sit here, sweet Rosamunda, and perchance thou shalt tell me thy news."

They sit upon the bank, which sinks invitingly.

Rosamunda. "The King's sister — the wicked Sophia — loveth thee, and has sworn thou shalt marry her, my love."

The Knight. "I wilt marry, prithee, none but thee, oh, my fair Rosamunda!"

Rosamunda. "And they say that the wicked King Oscar wilt marry *me* —"

The Knight, springing to his feet and flourishing his sword. "Never! I wilt kill him first!"

A terrible din behind the scenes (Pip, Bunny, and Peggy banging trays, stamping and ringing a bell).

Rosamunda, springing up. "I hear his army coming! Oh, save me, save me!"

The Knight, putting one arm about her, and flourishing his sword with the other. "Feareth not, sweet Rosamunda, with me thou art safe! Come to the open where I wilt fight your enemies and put them to flight!"

Exit. Noise increases, shouts and screams added. End of scene I.

Pauline turned to Helen. "The love-making was not very realistic, was it?"

"It was all perfect."

Peggy appeared. "Will the audience please promise not to look?"

The audience turned its back, all except Stentor, who lay and watched with sombre eyes. Stentor did not approve of plays, unless he were given a part as lion or tiger.

Helen, her head rigid, observed, "It's very trusting of us not to look, with those awful noises going on behind us."

"This second stage has a *pièce de résistance* in the shape of straw," Pauline said. "Bubbles came home one day carrying a huge bundle of it. He had got it from a carter's boy in exchange for a new pair of woollen gloves. That and the sword are their most valuable stage properties."

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"Scene II!" said a voice, and the audience turned round.

At the platform end the green tablecloth had been taken away, and left bare boards exposed. On a bed of straw the Knight, in very old and tattered pyjamas, reclined. By his side was a cup of water. On his ankle a thick chain (Stentor's travelling chain) fastening him to a staple (a huge rusty nail) in the wall. Absurd as it was, Helen felt a thrill of emotion pass through her. Bubbles looked so sad, so beautiful, lying there on his straw, in the dim light. He spoke, and she smiled.

"Ah, my sweet dead Rosamunda, I starve for thee. I wilt not touch their food, though methinketh I am very hungry." Sighs deeply and raises himself on his elbow. "Dead! Dead! Dead!" Falls back.

Enter Sophia (clad in an old red dressing-gown of Pauline's), followed by her Maid of Honour (palpably striving to keep back giggles).

Sophia. "We bring thee food, Sir Knight."

The Knight. "Oh, wicked creature, thou knoweth I wilt not eat thy food."

Sophia, turning to her Maid of Honour. "Fetch food, varlet!"

Exit Maid.

Sophia. "Oh, Sir Knight, why wilt thou not eat and marry me?"

The Knight. "I love none but the sweet Rosamunda."

Sophia. "But she is dead. Thou knoweth that the King, my brother, poisoned her because she would not marry him."

The Knight, rising to his feet. "Oh, that I were free to kill him and thee!"

Enter Maid of Honour, bearing food (a slab of gingerbread on a piece of gold paper spread across a plate).

Sophia. "Give it to me, varlet;" she takes it to the Knight; "see, food of nectar on a golden plate carried by lily hands. Wilt thou not eateth?"

The Knight, sinking back on his straw. "I grow weak! Nay, wicked creature, away!"

The Maid of Honour, with a giggle. "The King clometh!"

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

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Enter King Oscar (Bunny, with the red eider-down tied about him with string, the gold crown upon his head, and carrying a walking-stick as sceptre, adorned with a yellow bow).

From behind, a voice announces his advent.

King Oscar, in deep and earnest tones. "He's dyin'! Fool, why don't thou eateff?"

The Knight, trying to rise, but falling back. "I wilt never touch food in this Palace. I scorn it, oh, cruel monster and murd'rer by stealth!"

Sophia. "Eat and marry me!"

The Knight. "Never!"

The King, with diabolical glee. "I could kill thee wif knifes till thou bleggest to deff! I could stangull thee till thy face puffeff! I could — I could —" agonised pause; a voice from behind prompts, "dig thee to the floor with a nail as the redoubtful Jail did!" King repeats: "dig thee to the flooah wiff a nail as the — the doubtfuljay did!"

The Knight, in a weak voice. "But thou — cannot make me taketh — food from the hands — that killed — my Rosamunda!"

The King. "Ha! I am not so sure-ah! We will force the food down thy wicked froat!"

Sophia. "Oh, degradeth him not, brother. First let us tempt him with dainty nectar food. Fetch the cake studded with fruit that grows only on Olympus, and costs a thousand pounds a slice, varlet!"

Exit Maid of Honour. Returns with slice of bread and raspberry jam.

Sophia, bringing it to him. "Dear Knight, perchance eat, I pray thee!"

The Knight. "Never!"

Sophia. "Eat but one little piece, I pray thee. It is most dainty."

The Knight. "I scorn it!"

The King. "Force it down his froat. Stay, I will!" Comes forward (stumbling over the eider-down). Struggle ensues.

The Knight very realistically ejects what is put into his mouth.

Sophia. "It is no good. Oh, why did I ask thee to



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kill Rosamunda, my brother? He loveth me not! Yet," raising both arms to Heaven (sleeves fall back, exposing skinny little arms, quivering with earnestness), "I am glad I said kill her! I am glad she is dead! Oh, sweet Knight, eat and marry me!"

The Knight. "Never!"

The King. "We will leave him now, Sofriah, and come latak to watch him slowly die inchy inch!"

Sophia, weeping. "Ah, eat and marry me!"

The Knight, in a whisper. "Never!"

Exit all except the Knight. He lies silent upon his bed of straw, then raises himself upon one elbow. "I die! Ah, Rosamunda, those days of old were happy! I get weaker." Begins to sing (from "The Gondoliers") :—

"Oh, bury, bury, — let the grave close o'er  
The days that were — that never will be more!  
Oh, bury, bury love that all condemn,  
And let the whirlwind mourn its requiem!  
Dead as the last year's leaves —  
As gathered flowers — ah, woe is me!  
Dead as the garner'd sheaves,  
That love of ours — ah, woe is me!  
Born but to fade and die  
When hope was high,  
Dead and as far away  
As yesterday! ah, woe is me!"

He sinks back, his voice grows lower.

"Oh, bury, bury, — let the grave close o'er  
The days that were — that never will be more.  
Oh, bury, bury love that all condemn,  
And let the whirlwind mourn its requiem —"

His voice sinks away. He lies still, his hands folded on his breast.

There followed a queer silence. Pauline gave a little laugh.

"Why don't you clap?" She began to clap lustily. Helen clapped too. The Cherub shrieked with glee. Sten-tor, wild with joy that the play was over, tore on to the stage and lovingly licked the dead Knight's face. From behind the scenes there came an ecstatic little voice, "Oh,

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

Bubbles, we *must* have him next time! Your faithful hound who lies aside your dead body!"

Bubbles sprang up. Stentor bounded at him. The Derrys reappeared. The tragedy was over.

By tea-time Helen thoroughly understood how it was that the grand Clearance Days produced so little effect.

The clearing went on, more or less, all the afternoon; the treasure-heaps grew big and the rubbish-heaps remained small. Then tea-time drew near, and Pauline, looking fagged, appeared with a huge bundle of old clothes.

"Oh, I don't know what to do with these! I'm tired of clearing."

A Derry chorus arose: "So am I, Mums!" and Helen beheld bewilderedly a sudden wild indiscriminate flinging back into boxes of treasures and rubbish alike; a joyful skurrying up and down stairs; a whirlwind of noise and bustle, and — the Clearance was over! She eyed the few scattered boxlids, bits of paper, and rubbish that still strewn the hall. She turned to Pauline. "It seems rather an inadequate result, does n't it?"

"Oh, I can see how you are laughing at us. I hate you. Nevertheless, *I have* cleared away a little more than that."

They had a picnic tea in the kitchen and after it washed up, dinner plates as well.

"Derrys," Pauline said, "let's sit round the fire and tell stories."

"When I'm a grown-up," observed Dulcie dreamily, after awhile, "I'm going to live always in a kitching."

Pip snorted. "You'll look fine living in a kitchen in a pale blue satin dress!"

"I'll wear a white pinny over it."

Helen patted the silky little head pressed against her knee.

"What a nice lot of jugs and things you have," she said.

Pip, huddled up on the rug, chin on knees, the fire-light glinting on her dark little head and face, observed appreciatively, "Hesky's very artistic. She saves all the broken things for the dresser."

"That second row of jugs is all cracked — every one of them," added Bubbles, lifting his head for a moment from Stentor's body.

The dusk deepened, and with it the red glow of the fire

deepened too. The Derrys, dotted about the rug before it, looked like elves. Stentor stretched his long length in absolute lazy enjoyment. Fragments of stories flew about lazily; but Helen sat for the most part silent, watching the red light flit about the small forms on the rug.

Bedtime came and the Derrys disappeared in detachments. From the bathroom there came sounds that once would have disquieted her. Now she merely smiled.

Pauline had put the Cherub to bed; the rest always put themselves.

"They take over an hour doing it," Pauline observed placidly, "so I don't let them go very late."

"I know; they always did."

They were silent awhile. Then Pauline spoke hesitatingly: "Where is Captain Carruthers now, Helen?"

"In Norfolk."

Pauline picked up the bent and battered poker, and poked the fire.

"I found Bubbles careering round the hall yesterday, with this as a sceptre, red-hot, blazing. He held it by a duster wound round the top. And those other Derrys dancing around, within an inch of it."

"I wonder your face is n't a network of wrinkles!"

"Oh, the Derrys won't wrinkle it, bless them!"

Silence fell between them again. The kitchen was lit only by the flickering flames of the fire. Helen sat back in her old chair, her face in shadow. Pauline, opposite her, leant forward, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands. The fire-light shone on her dark little face, full of thought. She looked ludicrously like Pip, and not much older.

Without moving her eyes from their study of the fire she said jerkily, "Of course I know — there's something — wrong. You can't tell me, Helen?"

"No, Pauline," Helen said gently.

Pauline nodded, and stared still into the fire.

Then Helen bent forward; she put out her hand and touched Pauline's knee; a flame shot up and showed a quiver of pain in her face.

"Pauline — you won't think me horrid? I want to keep you — but —"

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

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"If I thought you horrid I would n't be worth keeping," Pauline said gruffly.

Helen gave a little laugh; the flame, still flickering, showed the gleam of tears in her eyes.

"You're very precious," she said.

Pauline shook her head.

From the stairs came a cry: "Mums, we can't find Dulcie's nightie!"

Pauline rose. As she passed Helen, she touched her shoulder with her hand. "A speck of dust," she said, brushing it off, and went on out of the room.

She re-appeared a minute later, with the Cherub in her arms.

"I'm wanted upstairs. Bunny has split his pyjamas from head to foot, and Bubbles has cut his finger. I've to bind him up, and forage out new nighties."

"Is it a bad cut?"

"Oh, no. He said just now, 'Oh, Mums, I *wish* I had done it earlier! The blood would have done so beautifully for the knight.' Will you take the Cherub, Helen? He's rather restless — just while I'm upstairs?"

She deposited a fat, sleeping Cherub in Helen's lap, and left the kitchen.

Helen looked down on the Cherub; his lashes lay on his pink cheeks; his toes and fingers were curled in placid baby contentment. "It's a libel, Cherub." She cuddled him up close; his mouth widened in a sleepy smile, a great dimple dented his cheek. "Goo-goo," he gurgled, stretching out his fat legs and drawing them up again, luxuriating in the warmth of the fire; but his lashes never stirred from his chubby cheeks. "You're a cuddlesome bit of a Cherub in your nightie;" Helen clasped his toes; "and you're as warm as warm can be."

She did not know how long she had been sitting there, when a man's step roused her.

"Paul," Jem's voice said round the door, "I've lost a diamond ring for you to-day in a raffle. Give me an extra kiss for it, old girl."

Helen stood up laughing. "I'm sorry I'm not Paul," she said.

"You, Miss Alliston?" Jem was quite unabashed; "why,

this is good! I wish I could have got home earlier! What's that? The Cherub?"

The Cherub suddenly awoke; he leapt in Helen's arms. "Dad," he chortled. "Dad! Dad!"

Jem took him. "Go to sleep, you bad youngster."

The Cherub cast loving, strangling arms about his neck. "Ooo—ooo, Dad! Cheb's dad—Cheb lub—"

"Well, lub me a little more mildly, old chap. Miss Alliston, I can't speak to you—I am being strangled."

But even as he spoke the soft little arms relaxed about his neck; the yellow head fell on his shoulder; with a final gurgle of love and a smacking kiss in the air, the Cherub fell asleep again.

"Now that I can speak," Jem observed; "why are you in the dark and burdened with the Cherub?"

"He is n't a burden."

A wild little figure dashed round the door. "Hulloa, Dad! I *knew* you'd come in! I say, will you lend Bunny a pair of your piggies? We can't find any of his—we've been clearing to-day, you see."

"Would n't they be rather large?"

Bubbles came close, and eyed the sleeping Cherub.

"Miss Alliston, will you take him? He's asleep, you see."

Helen took him, and Bubbles climbed on to his father's knee. He sat, swinging his legs, his thin little bare toes shining white in the fire-light. "Well, old man," he began conversationally, "and how's the world been using you to-day?"

"Badly, Bubbles, badly."

Bubbles nodded his flaxen head.

"It's a good job Miss Alliston's here then, is n't it?"

"A very good job—except, perhaps, for her, Bubbles."

"Oh," with instant comprehension, "she won't mind if you're grumpy, will you, Miss Alliston?"

"Not at all," she protested gravely. "I shall take it as a compliment, as showing I'm not treated as a visitor."

"There, you see, Dad, is n't she a trump?"

"Yes, I think she is, Bubbles."

"I'm blushing, I assure you."

"Have you been writing much lately?" Jem asked.

"Badly."

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

"How's that? Drives you pretty mad, does n't it?"

"Yes; it seems feeble somehow — as if one should be able to make one's self do it."

"Oh, I don't know. There's a lot of rubbish talked about the artistic temperament, of course, so that one fights shy of talking about it, but there's a bit of truth in it, all the same. You've got the temperament, for good or ill, so you'll have to put up with the consequences of it, I'm afraid."

"If I were the real thing — I believe I should be able to write any time," she said thoughtfully.

"Oh, bosh! Pardon, but it is bosh all the same. I can always write, such as it is, but then — I have n't been tried much. I mean I don't know that I could under all circumstances, and anyway you're totally different. I'm afraid you'll never be able to force yourself to do good work, Miss Alliston."

"Then I must do second-rate."

"You won't do that," he said quietly.

"But suppose — hunger steps in?"

"You'll come to us for a piece of bread and cheese, won't you? There's always that, I think, at the worst of times, is n't there, Bubbles?"

Bubbles nodded.

"And brown sugar," he said earnestly, "and potatoes mostly."

"What more could one want?" Helen said.

"Oh, well," Bubbles looked thoughtfully into the fire, "I like a lump of butter — a *big* lump — inside the potato — and bad times we don't have a big lump."

"Anyhow, when I'm destitute, I'll come and beg at the 'Red Cottage' — lumps of butter or no lumps of butter."

"Are you doing anything else — any other work?" Jem asked.

"I'm teaching the piano to two little girls."

He groaned.

A shrill voice broke into the darkness.

"I *knew* it was! You — you *beast*, Bubbles!" Pip hurled herself on him, belabouring him with both fists.

"It was *mean* not to tell — me dad was — home!"

Bubbles bore it meekly.

"Bang away; it *was* pretty mean, Pip! I just forgot."

"That's enough, Pip," Jem broke in; "you forget things sometimes, you know."

Helen watched, by the firelight, the storm die out of the passionate little face.

Bubbles skipped off his father's knee. "Here you are, Pip! Get up!"

Pip gave him a final thump, which set Helen pondering on the expressive language of thumps, so different was the character of this last one.

"There's room for both," Jem said, and his arms tightened round the slim little bodies, as he rubbed his cheek against Pip's.

"It's so nice that a man has *two* laps, instead of only one, like a woman," Pip said.

In a few minutes Pauline came down.

"Jem, I'm ashamed of you! Derrys, why are n't you in bed?"

"Mums," Bubbles slipped to the floor and sidled up to Pauline, "oh, Mums, *may* we stop and help set the table for dinner?"

"No, Bubbles."

"Oh, Dad," Pip hugged her father close, "it would be so *lovely*!"

Jem's head turned anxiously towards Pauline. "Er—?" he said, but Pauline was firm.

"They have been keeping frightful hours lately, Jem; don't be foolish."

Bubbles skipped across to Helen. "*You* ask her!" he whispered.

"Might they—just for once—in honour of me, Pauline?"

"Oh, blessed queen!" Bubbles ejaculated ecstatically.

"No, really, Helen," Pauline said, striking a match, "you've had quite enough of them, I should say."

"I've never had enough of them!" indignantly.

Pauline lit the gas, and looked down straight into Bubbles' seraphic face, upturned in pleading.

"Oh, Mums dear, *do* let us!"

"Oh, very well! I give up all efforts at training. Oh, yes, it's all very well to hug me, you two, but some day

## "THE FAITHFUL KNIGHT"

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you 'll wish you had n't had a foolish mother with an artistic soul! And you need new pyjamas most terribly, Bubbles, and they *shall* be pink!"

"Mr. Derrington," Helen said demurely, "wants to ask you something, I think, Pauline."

Jem rose calmly. "Ah, so I do; thanks for reminding me, Miss Alliston."

"What is it, Jem? Thank goodness, you're not in blue pyjamas!"

"Oh, I'll get what I want, even in a prosaic black suit. Come into the morning-room a moment, Paul, will you?"

Pauline cast a laughing glance at Helen, and followed him from the room.

"Derrys dear, you 'll have to put shoes on, won't you? And Pip, you can't have only your nightgown."

"We 'll get coats. And then we 'll begin, won't we?"

They did begin.

"It's mostly cold dinner on Clearance Days, 'cept in winter. Mums *will* give dad something warm then, she says," observed Pip; "it's cutlets to-night. Bubbles, help me lay the cloth. Miss Alliston, can you reach the water-jug? Oh, dear, I wish I was grown-up, and stayed down to dinner!"

Helen intercepted a wink of Bubbles', meant only for Pip. She smiled and felt inclined to wink herself. She lifted down the jug, then took the Cherub upstairs and laid him down in his cot.

When she came downstairs again, there was an air of fresh hilarity in the atmosphere.

Pauline was frying the cutlets.

"Jem has told those two Derrys that they may have dinner with us!" she said in a shocked voice.

"Dear me, I *am* astonished!"

And Bubbles and Pip shrieked with impish glee.



CHAPTER XXXI

A VISIT FROM VIOLET

"COME in!"

Helen lifted her eyes from the highly-coloured picture of an abnormally long-bodied little girl in a blue frock playing with an abnormally short-bodied donkey, to which she had agreed to write a short story, and waited. The door rattled open, and a pretty, tanned face beneath a large-brimmed hat looked round it.

"Oh, it is you!" Violet swung into the room, seized Helen's hand, and shook it heartily. "I began to think I never should find you. You're rather near the skies, are n't you?"

"For the sake of my health!" she laughed.

Violet nodded. "Sort of pocket health. I know. Guess where I got your address, Miss Alliston? From that Tom Stanley-Browne! He's not quite such a boulder as he was, d' you know — this affair with that Kemp girl has done him good. He sent all sorts of messages to you, only I forget them. You don't look up to much."

"Well, you do."

"Oh, me! I'm as right as a trivet."

"You don't look as though you had been spending your existence in uncongenial frivolity."

Violet's tanned cheeks grew pink.

"Oh, I say! Don't you know? I'm married, you know!"

Helen gave a gasp.

"Married? *You?* My dear child, is it a joke?"

"Rather! One long joke," declared Violet unabashed, "oh, I got pretty mad, you know, always being dressed up and smirking and parading myself. It was all very well for Rosamund to tell me there'd soon be the shooting and the hunting —"

"May I ask the name of your husband, Mrs. — er —?"

"Oh, of course it's Max; who else should it be?"

"Who else indeed?" murmured Helen.

## A VISIT FROM VIOLET

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There was a little pause.

Violet looked across, and met her eyes. An odd shyness crept into her face. "You — you think it's horrid, don't you?"

"Not horrid — but a pity."

Violet looked back into the fire; she nodded. "I know what you mean, but — I don't think it is. I've known Max ever since I was a baby — I know him through and through — and he knows me. And we never squabbled on our honeymoon, as the idiots do in books, and make it up and fuss about, and weep, and so on. I've no patience with it."

"I have n't much myself."

"No, is n't it ridiculous? I think books are — heaps of them, that is, — don't you? Oh, I forgot you're an author. But look here, Miss Alliston, is n't it absurd the way the lovey-dovey wife who worships the very ground he treads on is always ready to believe the first person who comes to her with a story of his past, or some rot of that sort?"

"Ridiculous; but then it's generally to make the plot, you know."

"Oh, you're laughing. Well, I know one thing — Max and I are n't always talking about the moonlight, and when we first felt our hearts give a hop, and what we read in each other's eyes, and all that sort of nonsense, but if a hundred people came to me, each with the same story, and showed me absolute proofs, I would n't believe a word against Max!"

Helen's face lightened. "I believe you will get on all right," she said.

Violet nodded. "And — and you need n't get thinking of the other man, Miss Alliston," she said with a laugh. "That simpering lunatic — Bertha Dunscombe — said to me, 'Oh, Violet darling, it's all very well now, but — suppose another man comes along?' I glared at her, and said I did n't care if a thousand other men came along, and we'd put them all up — Max and I — provided they were the right sort."

"You shall have some tea for that," Helen said.

"Let me help get it."

Presently sipping her tea, Violet resumed: "When we've settled down, you'll come and stay with us, won't you? You would n't mind living in a corner of a ruin, would you?"

"I should love it. Where is the ruin?"

"It's Max's place—right up in Northumberland. It would soon put some colour into your cheeks. You should ride and ride—ah, you like that? Well, we're pretty hard up, but we're going to have good horses, and not a motor shall degrade our place! I think I shall grow things and sell them, and eggs too. Max hates London, you know, so we'll live there. It's an awful old ramshackle farmy sort of place, all going to ruin. Now you talk," she added ingenuously.

"I want to hear some more. Was Mrs. Darcy pleased with your engagement?"

"Pleased? Oh, there was an awful bother! You see, no one had dreamed of suspecting such a thing—including me! I don't believe Max had, till he saw that lanky young Trelawney gaping at me. Then Max turned crusty. But he did n't say anything then. It was one night when I had a headache—I'd never had such a thing in my life till this year—and I was alone and pretty down, and Max came, and I began to moan and grumble, and all of a sudden he suggested that I should marry him. Oh, I did jump! and then I laughed, and Max grew awfully queer and dignified, so that I was almost afraid of him, and then—I don't know—but I kept thinking about it, you know—and so in the end we went to mother and told her. Oh, she *was* wild! She wanted me to marry young Trelawney, because he's heir to all sorts of things. Mother and I have never got on; it's no use pretending we have. She always liked Rosamond. Dad and I were chums," her voice grew low; "he was killed out hunting six years ago," she said. "Oh, Max was good to me then! I hated every one except him—"

Helen did not break the silence that followed. After a little while Violet roused herself. "Well," she said, "so then Max got a license and things, and we went off and got married."

"It was a bore, was n't it? Like shopping, but one

## A VISIT FROM VIOLET

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has to do such things sometimes." Helen's eyes were twinkling.

Violet laughed out.

"Well, so it was! But it was soon over, and then we had our honeymoon."

"Where did you spend it?"

"I could n't tell you. We started from Depwoid in Hertford, and then we just went here, there, and everywhere, all over the place. It was a walking tour, you know, just with knapsacks, and an occasional bag sent on; we slept in inns, and had all our meals out in the open air."

"Did n't it ever rain?"

"Oh, dear, yes! We got soaked to our skins often and often."

"And you did n't squabble even then?"

"No."

"Then you will be all right!"

"Miss Alliston, you don't treat me with the respect due to a married woman."

"Oh, don't, you baby! I can't realise it."

"I'm dreadfully offended."

"We'll see how long you can maintain a dignified silence then."

"I give in," she cried promptly; "I'm not going to begin a thing I could n't go on with. Do you know," she broke off, "that poor Charlotte Waring is having a bad time. Her husband has had a paralytic stroke; it has left him with his right arm and side quite useless, and he's very ill altogether, and she's nursing him. They're somewhere in the south of France now. She never leaves him."

There was a silence. Helen sat looking into the fire thinking of the Warings.

"'Member how you snubbed me that first time we met, Miss Alliston?"

"Misunderstood your meaning, you mean."

"Yes, you did, did n't you? When I told Max, he said it served me right. I liked you from that moment. I wish you'd tell me what you're doing, and all that," she broke off; "you don't think it's awful cheek, do you? You see," she fidgeted with her gloves, "Max and I—we don't like many people—you need n't laugh," she added awkwardly.

## HELEN ALLISTON

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"I should n't think of laughing," Helen said gently; "I should be very sorry if you left off liking me."

"No fear of that! I never do. Now, fire away."

They sat and talked for some while, then Violet rose.

"Well, I'll have to go. I suppose there's no chance of my seeing your landlady? I'd like to awfully."

Helen went to the window and looked out. She shook her head regretfully. "My landlady takes the air in her backyard with a cricket cap perched high on the top of her head. I wish you could have seen her so — she's glorious! But you shall see her with her glory, otherwise her cricket cap, departed. I'll ring for something. Think of something. Norah's out, so Mrs. Greaves will come."

They began to laugh.

"I can't. I can't think of a thing!"

Helen looked round the room.

"I can't either!"

"Just ring for her, and leave the rest to Providence."

"I couldn't put myself into such an undignified position."

Violet suddenly darted across the room, and sent the bell pealing through the house.

"Now you've got to think of something!"

Helen shot her an amused glance.

"I've thought!" she said.

Violet looked disappointed.

"Come in!" Helen called, in answer to a tap on the door.

Mrs. Greaves, with her best cap on, appeared round the door.

There was a little silence.

"You rang, Miss Halliston?"

"No. Mrs. Gunning did — she wants to speak to you, Mrs. Greaves."

There was a chuckle from Violet.

The landlady turned to her inquiringly. "Yes, miss? I should say, ma'am?"

Violet stared at her helplessly.

"Er — er —"

"Was you thinking of wanting rooms, ma'am? There's the first floor front to let now, and that's hall. I may say

## BUNNY

I'm very full always, being as I do always anxious to look after the 'ome comforts of my ladies and gentlemen; and would you like to look at the rooms now, ma'am? This room, though the best I can do at the price and scrupulous clean, don't give no notion of the others."

"I would like to see the rooms," Violet said, with a scathing glance at Helen, "though I—I mean—I'm afraid we should n't be needing them just now."

"Oh, certingly, ma'am; it ain't no trouble, but a pleasure."

She led the way downstairs, and Helen followed behind Violet. Violet's profile, turned often towards her, was expressive.

During the scene that ensued she stood by, and enjoyed it, putting in now and then, a little query or remark, that further exposed Violet's ignorance. Violet was an absolute baby in all matters pertaining to apartments; extras and non-extras were a mystery to her; terms she knew nothing of.

She became lost in the flood-tide of her would-be landlady's eloquence. She floundered in deeper in her efforts after a seemingly display of wisdom.

Mrs. Greaves' final remark was delightful to Helen.

"And if your 'usband 'as to be hout all day, ma'am, you can assure 'im 'e can be quite easy about you, seeing as I'd be pleased to keep an heye on you."

On the doorstep Violet turned. "I'll pay you out!"

From behind Helen came Mrs. Greaves' voice. "If you think you might fancy the second floor front, ma'am—" Violet fled.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### BUNNY

THE days dragged on slowly. Helen faced them and what they held with a brave front. One day—it was damp and close and unhealthy—a grimy mist hung about the streets; the pavements were muddy. She was walking towards Gilroy Street. She looked straight

in front of her ; she shivered. The traffic worried her ; the horses, stumbling now and again on the slippery mud, terrified her afresh each time.

She was so tired of mud. Her feet, to her weary fancy, were clogged with it, weighted with it. She turned down a side street, where comparative quietness reigned. Children played in the road, on the pavements, everywhere. She wondered whether they minded their squalid surroundings. Some of them were playing football with a decayed cabbage. She smiled whimsically as she passed with head averted ; after all, it was a better use to make of it perhaps, than passing on with disdainful nose.

She hurried. She longed to be out of the grey streets, out of the dirt. Suddenly she stopped short, her face went white. To her there came suffocatingly the smell of ether. It clung about her, penetrated, drove her trembling to the railings for support. Into her mind flashed, clear and acute, the dark hall at Thorpe, on a late November afternoon. She was standing alone, terrified, miserable, and stealing to her down the stairs there came that smell — And once she heard a cry — Afterwards they had told her her mother was dead. She had been too small to understand. She understood now. She had never thought of that afternoon since. She thought now, but now it was Boyne — Boyne — not her mother. A wave of sickness swept over her. She stood, white and trembling, drinking in that horrible smell.

Two women stood near, talking, and looking at the house. Vaguely, disjointed sentences came to her.

“Pore thing — they left it too late — they did n’t dare take her to the hospital — ”

Helen left the railings. Desperate, she walked on. She hurried, ran, to leave that pungent scent behind her. But the street — the whole world was permeated with it. It made her sick. She shook with a physical horror of it. When she reached her room she tore off her coat, her hat, her gloves. She was sure it clung to them. She dipped her face, her hands into a basin of cold water. An unreasonable horror was upon her. She was sure she could smell ether still. It urged on her imagination. She could not shut out horrible pictures of Boyne. She walked to and

## BUNNY

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fro the room, her hands locked together, straining at each other till they hurt.

"Oh, God, let me bear it for him!"

The pictures continued before her eyes.

She did not hear a slow, sturdy step ascending the stairs; she did not hear the first knock on her door. The second bang roused her a little. She stood still, looked unseeingly at the door—"Come in," she said mechanically. The pictures were there still—the ether clung about the room—The door was opened, and Bunny trotted in.

Something seemed to snap in her brain. She ran at him.

"Oh, Bunny! Oh, Bunny!" She caught him up, hugged him to her, tighter—tighter—"Oh, Bunny!" she cried breathlessly.

She sat down weakly, and held him to her. She kissed his cold little red cheek, she hugged him.

"Ugh!" Bunny fought himself free with hands and heels. Then he sat erect: In the dusk he could not see her face. "S'prised?" he said, "awful s'prised?"

The old familiar brevity, the old sturdy independence. Oh, dear little sane, healthy Bunny. Her arms tightened round him. What a soft bit of a body it was. "I was just too surprised to speak!" she said.

He chuckled. "Mum comin'."

"Yes," she said, "but I've got you, Bunny, you—"

"Not kiss!" he interposed, ducking his head.

She gave a little queer laugh. "Just one, Bunnykins, just one!" She kissed the brown nape of neck, which was all she could get at; then she rose. "There, Bunny, now I'll be sensible. We'll light up, Bunny, and get tea ready. I want to see you, Bunny."

She held his shoulder. She took him with her to the mantel-shelf, where the matches were. She had to let him go while she struck a match, and lit the gas. "Keep close, Bunny," she said. In the light she looked down at him. "Let me take your things off." She knelt beside him, unbuttoning his short coat. She laughed suddenly. "This is Bubbles' handkerchief," she said, as she unwound it from his neck.



"Oom," Bunny said.

"And Peggy's gloves! Oh, you dear Derrys!"

"Get tea?" Bunny said.

"Yes, we will get it ready now. I won't kiss you any more — you like me a little, don't you, Bunny?"

Bunny put out a brown hand and fingered her brooch. She dropped her chin a little and rubbed it against his hand. "Do you, Bunny?" she said.

"Lots," Bunny said; "tea?"

"Bunny, you're good for one! You're bracing! Yes, we must see about tea."

She thought gladly that there was the pot of honey Pauline had sent her, and they could make toast.

When Pauline came in, breathless and wet, she found Helen on her knees before a wonderfully good fire, making toast, with Bunny squatting beside her, helping. Helen's cheeks were hot; she laughed as she greeted Pauline.

"You dear blessings!" she said. "Pauline, will you be content with bread and butter and honey?"

"Oh, yes, with you as an *entrée*. Did Bunny find you all right?"

"Yes, he found me."

"I poked him in, and told him to come up — it was just beginning to rain — I did n't expect your landlady to escort him. I remembered at that moment that I'd locked up the house and hidden the key in one of the palm-pots in the porch, so I had to send a telegram to Hesky. She took all the Derrys to see her husband, you know, to-day — all except Bunny, who'd been naughty. They are due home at five — oh, dear, think of them all locked out!"

They had a cosy tea. Helen laughed and talked gaily, with Bunny, most of the time, on her knee.

"There's such a beautiful solidity about Bunny," she said; "and oh, dear, how glad I am he was naughty!"

"Mind he does n't hear you!" Pauline laughed. "He looked so pathetic — when Bunny's pathetic he just sits and looks at you."

"I know. I've seen him. A round, brown imp with a wistful gaze; he's irresistible."

"So I had the sudden idea of bringing him to see you."

"As a punishment."

"Oh, of course. Helen, you are thin. I don't believe you eat enough. You know, your writing will fall through if you starve yourself."

"Pauline, you don't deserve to be the wife of an author. Don't you know that all the good work is done by penniless youths who spend their only sixpence on a second-hand book, and live on a crust of bread, and burn the midnight oil?"

Pauline sat looking sombrely in front of her.

Bunny tilted back his head and eyed Helen gravely. "You eat," he said, "eh?" He held up his slice of bread and honey, and smiled alluringly.

Helen nibbled a piece.

"I went to Jem's office this afternoon," Pauline observed presently. "He was cranky to take me to a theatre to-night." She sighed. "You see, we had such a good excuse — it was the anniversary of our wedding day the Tuesday before last; but of course we couldn't, with Bunny. And the trains are so bad — by the time I'd taken him home and got back again —"

"Pauline, go! Let me have him — let him stay with me to-night."

"I would n't think of such a thing."

"Pauline, do! I'd love him. You may have him back to-morrow. I'll make up a bed somehow —"

"But to palm him off on you like that!"

Helen laughed joyously. She caught Bunny to her. "You'll stay with me, Bunny! You'll be mine all to-night. Your mother is insulting to you, is n't she? You don't mind where you sleep, Bunny, do you? My bed is too small."

"Well, could we fetch him after the theatre?" Pauline said hesitatingly.

"No, you could do nothing of the sort! He's going to belong to me now till his father fetches him to-morrow evening."

Pauline laughed. "To-morrow evening?"

"Yes," firmly. "When Mr. Derrington leaves the office to-morrow he shall receive his son from my hands. Till then he's my property."

Bunny sat silent, absorbed. He had taken it in now.

He tilted back his head, his round brown face beamed up in utter joy at Helen. His sticky fingers closed round hers, taking possession of her. He gave a chuckle. "Sleep on floo-ah, eh? *Camp*, eh, de-ah?"

"Yes, Bunny. Oh, we'll have fun, won't we? Just you and me, Bunny."

She was holding him close, as if she never meant to let him go again. Over his head her eyes, very bright, met Pauline's anxiously.

"It's settled, is n't it?"

"Oh, very well. I could n't have hinted, because such an idea never entered my head."

"Oh, you did n't hint! When shall we turn her out, Bunny?"

She went very soon. As the door closed Bunny said, "Wash-up?" in a business-like tone.

"Yes, Bunny."

"Watah — tow'l?"

"I'll get them."

"Bun help."

"Very well, Bun shall help."

Kneeling on a pillow placed on a chair Bunny helped wash up the tea things. He was too absorbed to speak while he did it. His frowning little face bent over the cups and saucers; he had an ingenious way of opening wide his mouth and breathing on the china and spoons, then rubbing till he was hot and red, to give them a polish. Now and again he cast up anxious glances from beneath black lashes, at Helen, asking her opinion. Her opinion, invariably one of admiring surprise, being given, the anxiety turned into beaming joy, and back went Bunny to his rubbing.

After tea she gave him pencil and paper, and Bunny drew. He was not an exigent artist. He put his whole mind and soul into what he was drawing, then when it was finished held it up to Helen.

"What?" he said.

The first time she tried diplomatically to evade a direct guess, but Bunny pinned her down.

"A ship," she hazarded at last.

Bunny's face dented into dimples of joy. He shook his head.

"'Gain!" he chuckled.

"An animal!"

Another shake. More dimples.

"A man!"

And so on. The wider her guesses, the more delighted the artist. Once when, through trying overzealously to guess wide, she hit on the right thing, his face sobered.

"Oom," he said dejectedly; then, beamingly, "Bun jawah anoffer?"

He sat on her knee while he drew. Bunny was not fond of laps; but Helen's artfully tendered suggestion that chairs with pillows on them were beloved of little girls had sent him clambering on to her lap.

He entered into the preparations for his bed with deep earnestness. He was disappointed at the comfort of the arrangements. When Mrs. Greaves, after a flattering visit in connection with his bed, had departed, he trotted sombrely at Helen's heels, and sighed deeply.

She sat down. "Come and tell me what is the matter, Bunny."

He drew closer, and looked up earnestly into her face.

"Camp?" he said.

"Yes, dear."

Reawakened hope shone in his face.

"Oom," he chortled, and trotted back into the bedroom.

Helen waited to pick up some of his artistic efforts, then followed him.

Bunny was businesslikely engaged in pulling his bed to pieces, — that bed, so carefully and laboriously built up by Helen and Mrs. Greaves.

He smiled alluringly at Helen as she entered. "Camp on floo-ah," he said contentedly, and tugged a blanket across the room.

"Oh, Bunny!"

He stopped and stared at her wonderingly.

"Bun not tired them," he assured her.

"But it's very naughty of you."

"Bun naughty?" he trotted up to her, and caught hold of her skirt.

"What Bun done, de-ah?"

"Bunny, what a love you are!"

He wriggled his head out from her arms.

"Come help make camp?" he insinuated with an adorable smile.

"No, no! That's what was naughty."

"Naughty," he said consideringly. His puzzled eyes studied her face earnestly. "Bun good — Bun asked — oh, Bun is *n't* naughty!"

"No, you're not, Bunny. I see, dear, you thought I meant you might make a camp."

"Oom. *Now* help?"

She shook her head.

"You want to sleep on the bare floor, Bunny?"

"Bare *geround!*" he corrected reproachfully. "Soljar — hardboats —" he paused and thought; "hard *ships*," he amended triumphantly.

"You would catch cold."

"Oom," joyfully.

"It's no good, Bunny, you'll have to sleep on a mattress with proper bedclothes;" and then she cast about for some way of comforting the dejected little creature before her.

She sat down and drew him to her. He came unresisting; brown, sorrowful, heaving a great big sigh.

"You see, Bunny, the queen heard about the hardships her soldiers were suffering, and she sent out mattresses and blankets and pillows to them."

He leant against her knee, looking up gravely into her face.

"And her soldiers used them, of course; they would n't be so rude as not to use them."

He turned and trotted off to the bedroom.

"Come make bed?" he said.

They had supper together, — a cosy little supper *tête-à-tête*, — and Bunny was very charming.

After supper Helen washed him. She looked anxiously at the red and glowing little face that emerged from her towelling. She could not understand how it was that it was not trimmed with streaks of dirt where Bunny screwed it up beneath the sponge.

He said his prayers to her. He went through "Our Father," then added his own quota, which was short and

## BUNNY

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business-like — "God bress ally peopull 'cludin' Bun. Amen."

Then he sat on her lap and studied the fire awhile. Every now and then he put up his hand, fingers outspread, and rested its palm on her cheek. It was a funny little way he had of showing affection.

"Bun guard you if burgles come, de-ah?" he said earnestly, as she tucked him in.

"Yes, please, Bunny."

She stood looking down on the round brown head cuddled into the pillow.

"Bun nevah go sleep ally night," he assured her, his heavy lashes lifting. "Bun guard — you — ally — night."

She waited a moment; then bent and kissed him softly, unrepulsed. She went back to the other room and took up some sewing. She felt tired, worn out, as if she had been through some violent physical exercise. As she worked she kept glancing towards the open door that led into her bedroom. Every now and then she got up, and went into it, touching Bunny's head or cheek with soft fingers. It was good to have him there — so good!

When she went to bed herself she fell asleep almost directly.

Once in the middle of the night something warm and soft touched her face. She put up her hand and captured Bunny's.

"Bun guardin' you," a deep little voice came through the dark.

"I feel so safe, Bunny; but lie down now, dear."

"Oom."

She heard him snuggling down into his lowly bed. She bent over, reached down, and stroked his head, his cheek; rested her hand in the warm softness of his neck.

"Bunny, I wish you were mine."

Muffled by the pillow came his deep little response. "Bun — guard — you —" His head slipped beneath her hand, deeper into the pillow; there was the movement of his cuddling down closer into his bed, then all was still.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BOYNE PREPARES FOR THE WORST

BOYNE turned businesslike to the table. "I go up to the hospital on Monday — the operation's on Tuesday. I want you to undertake some things for me, old man."

"Anything," Charlie said curtly.

"Well, I've written a letter or two. If I pull through you're to burn them. If I don't — I want you to send this one off;" he handed him a letter addressed to Helen at Gilroy Street. "It's a note telling her the operation's due — see? But the postmark must be this place. You're to have that sent off from here before five on Tuesday — the operation's in the morning — if I'm done for. And send this," he handed him a telegraph form, "so that she gets it the evening of the day she gets the letter."

Charlie took the telegram. "It's — ?"

"To say it's all over — from you."

Lord Belmain laid it down hurriedly. There was a silence in the room. Boyne sat with lined brow, staring into the fire. A telegram was hateful — but she dreaded suspense always — and it would save her a night of waiting. He had been through it over and over again; had threshed it all out, and this seemed the best way.

He looked up with worried eyes; then he smiled. "I've made free with your name. I've signed the wire 'Belmain.'"

"All right."

Boyne sat silent again, his eyes on the grey-white paper of the telegraph form.

"And what orders if you pull through, old chap?" Charlie's voice was labouredly cheerful.

"Then I shall want you at the hospital. I shall scribble a note of some sort — as soon as I can — saying it's over and all right. And you'll enclose it in another envelope here to Dr. Willings, and he'll post it."

"But won't Miss Alliston guess you'd come to London?"

"No!" he frowned; "how should she? She'll think

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the operation's to be down here. I won't have her know. She might come to see me."

"Why should n't she?"

"She sha'n't. Hospitals are beastly places — the smell of the anæsthetics — I won't have her come to me there."

"She would n't mind."

"I should." His jaw was grim.

Charlie understood vaguely the care he was showing for Helen; the zeal to shield her; the depth of his thought for her, and was silent.

"You know," he began haltingly at last, "I've been speaking to — to Dr. Willings; you'll be pretty weak and all that after it's over — you won't be able to write for a few weeks, I expect."

"That's all right. I'll write the last thing on Monday. I don't write often. She won't know."

Charlie coughed loudly, stared into the fire miserably, asked at last if there were n't anything else?

"I think that's all," Boyne said slowly. "If I think of anything else I'll tell you. I'm making use of you, eh?"

Charlie went across to the window, and looked out.

"It's going to rain, I believe," Boyne said.

"Looks like it," assented Lord Belmain.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### AT LAST

**W**ILHELMINE and Georgine had developed a romantic attachment for Helen; but it did not improve their scales and exercises at all. Helen went patiently through them three days a week; patiently corrected the same mistakes. If she uttered so much as a weary "Oh!" they wept. That was all that their romantic attachment had done; it had changed their stolid attitude into a weeping one.

They wrote notes on common scented paper to her; laborious notes, sometimes unintelligible to their recipient.



## HELEN ALLISTON

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They insisted on spending their scanty pocket-money on boxes of awful, pink, scented soap, on ornamental celluloid combs for her hair, and on strings of pearl beads for her throat.

Herr Müller himself, fat, dirty, and amiable, presented her with another sausage.

She tried to feel grateful for all this embarrassing affection. At least it provided her with amusing topics for her letters to Boyne. She was grateful for that. It seemed harder and harder as the days went slowly by, to find amusing things to write about. The little Müller topic was fraught with danger; she had to be careful lest she should let slip the fact that she gave them music lessons. She let him think she knew them only as friends of Mrs. Greaves.

All the days were bad — some were worse than others. There was the day when she came across the freesia in a florist's window. That was a terrible day. It stripped all her hard-won courage from her and left her shrinking and shaking with terror. Since that day she had averted her eyes from the florist's window — she dared not look.

She received a queer letter from Mrs. Stanley-Browne, a jumble of facts and feelings that made her laugh. From it she gathered that the writer had surrendered, that there were to be two weddings in the Stanley-Browne family; Sara's first, which was evidently to be a gorgeous affair, at the prospect of which poor Mrs. Browne, albeit naively proud and pleased, was full of nervous apprehensions. She entreated Helen to come and stay with her beforehand — "Being as I have living so quiet and secluded not to mention never having weddings before in our families I would be so pleased to engage you either as friend or at the same terms as before for a few weeks before the day to help with little matters and I do miss you my dear more than I ever thought to miss a mere lady-companion and that's the truth and Sara says she's agreeable for you to come though he is a count and much thought of in foreign circles."

She was also bidden to Tom's wedding, which would take place in the beginning of the next year.

She sent the letter off eagerly to Boyne.

Wilhelmine and Georgine informed her one day that they were going to have a "barty" on the 20th of December. They further informed her they were going to wear "bink silk dresses, and have their hair loose and crimped and curled." They were to wear white silk stockings and black beaded shoes with high heels like "laties." "Farzer" was to provide three sausages for the occasion, and they were going to have ices. At the end of the music lesson they handed her a pink, scented envelope. It contained a wild appeal to her to come to the "barty." She shivered. It seemed to her that everywhere she was confronted with dates that she dared not let herself think of. It was November—the middle of November—and it might be any day now.

She looked down at the winding up of the letter.

"With our complment and rispetfly loveing Wilhelmine and Georgine Müller deer Fräulein."

She smiled. Another trifle to tell Boyne. It was time she had another letter from him; it was three weeks and a day since that last one came. But before that he had not written for four weeks. She went out and forced herself to eat a little ham and drink a cup of coffee. Eating had become a real difficulty to her; she turned from food with dislike—but she ate it. Mrs. Greaves shook her head mournfully over her; she had given up regretfully the notion of "appendagecitis," and had decided Helen was in a decline. She could see it in her eyes, she declared, and her thinness, and her looks. Moreover, she confided to Frau Müller that "they" were always deceitfully "bright and cheerful;" she had seen it many a time, "laughing, with one foot in their coffins."

The next day Helen was writing a letter to Lilian. Once it had hurt her to feel how thoroughly Lilian had gone out of her life. Now she saw her in a haze, dimly, and thought no more about it.

She heard the postman's knock; she had been listening—waiting—while she tried to write. She started nervously when she heard it, rose, and went downstairs—down those seventy-seven stairs—to see if there were a letter for her. There was, and it was addressed in Boyne's handwriting, only, somehow, there was a difference—a careful,

laboured look about it. The envelope shook in her hand, the letters blurred and danced. She toiled back, up to her room, and sat down, breathless and spent. Every letter from him now brought agony to her; she was frightened to open it and read what he might have to tell her. And this one — what was it that was so different about the writing? Did it mean that he had grown so much weaker?

Her hands fumbled at the envelope, trying to tear it open. With a vague instinct of wanting to be as far away from every one as possible, she went into her bedroom.

It was a short letter. Just a few lines. "The operation is over, and I'm through it splendidly. They won't let me write more just yet — you know what tyrants doctors and nurses are. I'm getting stronger every minute."

She read it at a glance, and dropped quietly with just one long sobbing breath on to her bed.

When she raised herself, she felt dazed and bewildered. She stared round the little room with puzzled eyes. What was she doing — lying there in the afternoon? She caught sight of the letter, crumpled and crushed, lying on the floor, and with a hot rush, memory came back to her.

She bent and picked the letter up; she was tingling from head to foot with the great sudden joy of it. She read it again and again — she kissed it, held it to her face. She was very tired — she lay back again on the pillow with the letter pressed close beneath her cheek — she was so happy — so happy!

She was one great thankfulness — her whole being pulsed with thankfulness — with a joy that kept her very still and quiet. Her head throbbed and ached, but she did not know it.

She lay there till the dusk deepened, and it was too dark to read those dear words any more. Then she went into the other room — how shaky she was! — and lit the lamp, and read them again.

The poor writing — she understood now. Of course he made out that he was much stronger than he really was — he would do that. And he had promised to let her know beforehand. She gave a little soft laugh. Of course she

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was very angry with him, but it was over — over — and he was well enough to write.

She raised the paper again, and kissed it gently.

Afterwards the reaction came. Unconsciously, she could not, after those weeks and months of strenuous waiting bring herself to believe in joy. She was strung up to a dangerous pitch. Her nights were bad. When she slept her overtaxed brain fed her with horrors; night after night she saw Boyne dead. She woke trembling.

She had her moments of realisation, too — moments in the daytime — when it would come upon her that the thing they had been waiting for had come and gone. And in those moments the fears she had for him — of a relapse — of his doing something rash, in spite of nurses and doctors — and a hundred other nervous fears — would all be lost in her great joy and thankfulness that the operation was over.

One grey afternoon she came in and was met at the door by Mrs. Greaves, her face long and portentous.

She smiled kindly. "Has Norah broken something?"

"It's not that, Miss Halliston — and you're looking faint like already —"

The horrible sympathy in the woman's eyes; the sort of gloomy enjoyment that struggled, almost against her will, for the ascendancy, brought a quick unreasoning fear to Helen that set her heart beating in heavy throbs.

"What is it?" she said harshly.

"Do you feel prepared like for a shock now?"

Helen's voice, sharpened from its usual beauty, cut across the other's unctuous gloom, imperiously. "Tell me what you mean, Mrs. Greaves!"

She obeyed involuntarily.

"It's that Capting Carruthers as I've seed your letters addressed to many's the time — 'e's come — 'e's upstairs, and 'e do look mortal bad."

Helen went towards the staircase; her step wavered a little; she caught the thin baluster in a close grip, and went on up the stairs.

Mrs. Greaves' voice followed her.

"He'd ought n't to 'ave come — any one can see that —"

'e's likely to do 'imself a norful injury — kill 'imself, very like."

Helen wondered painfully when she would reach the last flight. The thought of his having had to climb those stairs, caught her breath, and made her, for a moment, unable to go on. She began to feel stupid — to wonder sickeningly whether she really were only dreaming — surely those endless flights of stairs were not real, — she recognised them as nightmare. It was a terrible feeling — she shuddered as she went on, up and up. When she stood outside her door the dream-feeling cleared away — she knew it was all real. She looked down with wild anger at her helpless hands — they trembled, and she feared to touch the door-handle. She did not want to startle him — he might be sleeping; she must be very careful. She put out both hands and slowly turned the handle. Then she pushed open the door. Swiftly, sweetly, there came to her the fragrance of the red roses — a soft outrush of it, caressing her, stealing to her heart, her brain. She drew a quick little breath, and looked in. Yes, there they were, a great beautiful bunch of them, glowing — warm — sweet. But the fire was out. Oddly enough that fact came to her almost before any other, and stung her into a quick anger against herself — Providence. In the chintz chair some one lay back. From where she stood she could not see his face — but he was there; and for the moment the joy of his being there flooded her soul. Her white face was transfigured; she stood, for that moment, wrapped about with the perfume of the roses, mute with joy and love.

Then suddenly a terror swept the joy away. Why was he so still? Was she dreaming after all? She had dreamt so often that he was dead. She had seen him dead night after night. She dared not go to him. But the roses — they could not be death-flowers — those roses — the sweet red roses that whispered always in the warm sun of love and joy and happiness. Slowly, with the slowness of terror and dread, she moved across the room to him — stood looking down upon him. The roses were wrong — he was dead; and oh, how he had suffered before he died! She bent over him — she put a gentle hand to his heart — she held her ear close to his mouth. When she lifted her

head the tears were raining down her face. She did not know she was crying. She went quietly into her bedroom and fetched the rug from her bed, and laid it over his knees; she drew it about him gently, tenderly. Then she fetched paper and matches and re-lit the fire. She moved so softly that she did not waken him.

When the flames began to dart tentatively upwards, she filled her little kettle, and put it on the fire. Then she went across to the door. As she passed the roses she touched them softly, lovingly, bent and put her face to them. She went downstairs and out into the street, to the grocer's at the corner of the next road. She bought a tin of Brand's Beef-Essence, a bottle of Bovril, and a pound of dry biscuits.

She hurried back — running breathlessly up the stairs — a foolish fear that he would be gone, a wild longing to see him again, be with him again — urging her on.

He lay as before. But the room was brighter; the scent of the roses warmer, sweeter. The fire lit the room with flickering light.

She stood looking down on him; she twined her fingers till they hurt. Sobs rose chokingly in her throat at the sight of his awful weakness, his pitiable thinness. The longing to care for him made her face very beautiful, lit it with a lovely light; her hands went out longingly to him — but she did not touch him. She knew that this sleep was health-giving. She picked up the roses, and sat down quietly, holding them. She forced her eyes away from him. She had heard somewhere that one could waken a sleeper with one's gaze.

She sat there, very still and quiet. Sometimes she put the roses up to her face, rested her cheek lightly against their soft petals.

Outside the traffic rumbled in the distance. A boy in one of the back yards whistled "Stars and Stripes."

She glanced in apprehension at the figure in the chair, but it did not move.

The lodger beneath her room coughed; she looked towards the chair. Norah went past the door clattering a pail — but still he slept on. The water in the kettle had boiled long since; she had taken it from the fire.

Once, in spite of her will, she crept towards him, and listened again to his breathing. She went back to her chair and the roses, ashamed.

She had opened the tin of Brand's Beef-Essence, had uncorked the Bovril, put the biscuits on a plate.

She looked at them with a little shaky whimsical smile.

She heard a movement in the chair. She turned. She held her breath — waiting. He had moved, she saw his eyes open — fix themselves upon her — those terribly sick eyes.

She made a movement to rise. But he was quicker than she — with one great stride he was beside her — had caught her to him — his strength was astounding — he held her close — close —

"My God, Helen — you're real — at last."

"Have I been asleep, Helen — here?" he flushed, looking abashed; "and you've been putting things over me."

She drew herself away.

"And now you are to have a spoonful of Brand's —"

He frowned.

"I ought n't to have come if I can't keep awake."

She laughed a little soft laugh that made him smile in spite of himself.

"Of course you ought n't! And you are going to be punished with Brand's Beef-Essence and Bovril."

He glanced at the table and laughed unwillingly. He took a step towards her. "I won't touch those things," he said.

"Ah, let me fuss," she entreated. "Sit down."

"Come to me — I want to look at you;" he drew her close. "Helen, you have been ill, and you never told me!"

Her eyes met his, smiling with the mist of tears still in them.

"No," she said; "no, I have n't."

His hand touched the shadows beneath her eyes, gently, reverently — the hollows in her cheeks.

"Tell me the truth," he said, with the abruptness of pain.

"It was only — perhaps I have worried a little."

He looked down into her brave face. Slowly he read

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the beauty of it, and understood. His brow contracted; he drew her head to his shoulder and hid her face.

"Helen," he said huskily, "I'm not worth it —"

"Now may I fuss?" she said, standing before him as he sat again in the old chair. "Please, will you put yourself into my hands?"

"Yes," he said, in a tone of content. But when she went towards the fire to put the kettle on, he was up and beside her. "Let me do that."

She turned on him, her eyebrows up, in comical despair.

"You're hopeless. Go and sit down!"

"Well, just let me —"

"Oh," she said, "can't you understand? Go back to your chair. I'm being done out of my woman's prerogative." The note of earnestness in her laughing voice touched him keenly. He went and sat down meekly.

"First," she said briskly, "you shall have two teaspoonfuls of Brand's Essence on a dry biscuit, while the water boils."

"I won't," he said.

"You will," she was inserting a spoon into the tin as she spoke.

"Not unless you do too."

She laughed. "I'm not an invalid."

"Pardon — you are. Soon — when I'm stronger — I'm going to take you off to the south of France, then to Italy — Rome — Naples —"

She bent her head low over the tin.

"Will you come, dear?" he asked gently.

"Yes," she said to the tin. Then she lifted her head. There was a beautiful pink colour in her cheeks. "You are to have this now," she said determinedly.

"Very well; if you will too."

"I don't need it."

"Then I don't either."

She brought it to him with a long-suffering expression.

He laughed. "I don't mind. You're charming, anyway. Everything I have you will have too. Please sit down — here."

She ate her biscuit meekly. They laughed as they ate.



## HELEN ALLISTON

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"Now," she said, — "now that you are sustained by Brand's Beef-Essence, I want to know how you *dared* come here? How you *could* — oh, it was wrong — a mad thing to do —"

He broke in. "I did n't come as far as you think. I have a confession to make — and anyway — Helen, don't be cross! I just could n't live without you any longer!"

"Will you marry me in three weeks, Helen?"

"Oh!"

"I've waited so long. In three weeks I won't be such a feeble creature."

"Haven't you a nurse with you in the Belmains' house?" she interrupted.

"No. There's Charlie, you know, and his man. His people are abroad."

"They should n't have let you leave the hospital yet."

"They could n't help it. They were frightened. I warned them that I was getting feverish — my pulse obligingly did go up, really — I think they thought it was better to let me go, than have me turn into a lunatic on their hands. Helen, will you —"

"And I can't think how Lord Belmain let you come out to-day," she interpolated hurriedly.

"He did n't. I sent him out first. And I bullied that poor Hemming till, in terror of his life, he had to fetch me a cab. Helen —"

"I — I want to think a minute."

"Yes, dear."

There was silence in the little room. Boyne broke it softly. "All the time I have thought of you — and not thought of you as quite so beautiful. That night I wandered up and down outside I did n't see you quite so —"

She turned to him swiftly.

"You — did you wander outside, really?"

He nodded. "Why did you have a back room, Helen? And it rained."

"Oh!" she gave a little soft cry; "and you were out in it, and I did n't know! When was it?"

"The night I came to London. Why did n't you at least choose a corner house, — or near a corner, — and then I'd

## AT LAST

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have climbed the walls? But I'd have had to climb fifteen, Helen — Oh, Helen, I'm only joking — don't look like that. What does it matter now? I have you at last. Helen, need I wait any longer? Can't you tell me now? Will you marry me in three weeks' time?"

She shook her head.

"I know I ought n't to ask you — like that, only — Helen, I've wanted you so — and I want to take care of you — to try and make up for — this," he looked round the bare little room, frowning. "You never told me, — oh, Helen, let me begin — soon — to try and make you forget it all —"

"I —" she lifted her face to his. Her words came in a little, soft, breathless rush. "I want to — to marry you — now" — she said.

"I won't, Helen. You don't understand. I'm as helpless as a baby."

She looked down at the hands that held hers — they were white, thin; but still — a baby's could not clasp as they did. She cast him a whimsical glance, and he laughed.

"It's nothing to what I'll be when I'm well."

"I'm so fond of babies," she pleaded.

"But I'm not the little pink and white article. I'm just a log — and bad-tempered. I can't do it, Helen."

"You are shockingly ungallant."

"Very well."

She thought with plaintive countenance.

"I'm thinking what rule I have on the subject of inducing a rude man to accede to a lady's wish, oh, obstinate Classical Dictionary! I'm going to do it somehow."

"You won't," grimly. "Helen, you'd just be a nurse."

"Once you said — you said —"

"That you would make a beautiful nurse. So you would. But you said —"

"That you would make an awful patient. So you will."

He smiled at that artful little "will."

She picked up the roses. "I am seeking inspiration from them."

"Put them close to your face, Helen — to your beautiful hair — you and the red roses, Helen —"

She drew closer. "Where does one buy Special Licenses?" she whispered. "Oh, you don't know what a brazen creature I am! I shall buy a License — and I shall come and fetch you —" she broke off.

He stroked her hair softly.

"You are tempting me so horribly, Helen!"

She lifted beautiful eyes to his.

"Ah, can't you understand? Let me have my way," she pleaded. "You don't know how I long to look after you — tyrannise over you — make you take horrible medicines — run after you with beef-tea and jellies — worry you — fuss over you — make you take rest —" Laughter struggled in her voice with tears. "All these months I have wanted to do it — I have been tortured with the thought of your carelessness. Let me fuss — just this once. Let me come to you now — and nurse you. I long so to make you strong again — you were so beautifully strong once — I — I must look after you. Can't — oh, can't you understand?" her voice broke. She tried to hide her face with her hands, but he drew her to him.

"Hide it here," he whispered.

Presently he spoke. He spoke slowly, haltingly, as if he felt how inadequate words were.

"I believe I can — understand, Helen — only — you see, I — dared not — because — I'm not worth it — dear."

She stood alone in her room. She looked round it with incredulous eyes. It was beautiful — beautiful.

She could not believe it. She picked up the red roses — she went to the chintz-covered chair, and laid her hand softly against it.

She could not believe it; yet she did not feel now as if she were dreaming. It was all real — and far more beautiful than any dream could ever be. That was how she knew it was real.

Gently, lingeringly, she arranged the roses in a bowl. She touched each one separately — the beautiful red roses.

Then she went into her bedroom. She must thank some one for it all. When she came out she stood looking at the roses. Then she smiled.

"I must! Oh, I must!"

## MESSRS. LOVE AND JOY

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She slipped on her hat and coat, and went to the door. She turned and looked back at the red roses.

"You are so beautiful. And to think I doubted your message," her breath caught; "you could only bring the message of joy and sweetness. And you tried so hard to tell me — tell me;" she had gone back to them, and was caressing them gently; "but even you could not tell me quite how beautiful — it — was. No one could tell me that — not even you — no one but Boyne could tell me that." She bent and kissed them, then went out.

She went to three florists, and at the third she found her freesia. A shilling a spray. Recklessly she paid her shilling. She took the pale spray home with her, and set it in the Venetian vase, close beside the roses. She laughed softly — with the tears in her eyes.

"It is all real — real —" she touched the roses, then the freesia; "and it is more beautiful even than you!"

## CHAPTER XXXV

### MESSRS. LOVE AND JOY

**N**O one was there but Lord Belmain and the Derrys — Derrys and Derrys — all of them, down to the fat Cherub of them all himself.

Outside the church, in the pale beams of the benign old sun, they stood to say good-bye.

Helen, tall, beautiful, all in grey, with wonderful pale grey furs that Boyne had given her, looked down lovingly at her Derrys.

Lord Belmain seemed to derive a good deal of amusement from them. He watched them as they swarmed about her. Boyne watched too, from glad, tired eyes.

"They wanted to bring rice, and old shoes, and all sorts of horrible things, but I would n't let them," Pauline said, touching Helen's furs with a little quick gesture.

Boyne laughed.

"That was good of you, Mrs. Derrington."

## HELEN ALLISTON

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"Oh, beautiful love," Dulcie pressed close to Helen, "many Happy Returns of the Day!"

Peggy beamed up at her.

"I think gley's jus' as nice as white slatin," she chuckled.

"That's a bigger compliment than you know," Jem assured her. "There were almost tears over that grey cloth."

Bubbles accosted Boyne. "I was thinkin' of marrying Miss Alliston."

"Awfully sorry, old chap. I'm afraid we can't undo it now."

"Oh, I don't mind much so long as you're *awful* nice to her."

"I'll try to be awful nice to her, Bubbles."

"I don't see," observed Pip, "*when* we're to give you our wedding presents. Mother said we weren't to give them yet. You've been in such a hurry, haven't you? You've never been engaged at all!"

Boyne glanced at Helen.

"We apologise," he said. "I wonder if the marriage could be annulled? We really hadn't considered the matter from the Derry point of view."

"I thought peoples had wedding-bleakfasts and spleeches," put in Peggy beamingly.

"So we will, Peggy," Boyne assured her, "when we come back—before we go abroad; we'll have such a wedding-bleakfast as was never seen before. You Derrys shall be the only guests, and Bubbles will be called upon for a spleech!"

Peggy gurgled with joy.

"I know!" cried Bubbles. "We'll put our presents by your plates! Oh, Eureka!"

He sidled up to Helen. "Oh, Newly-wed Queen," he whispered, "I'm goin' to buy you a *lovely* present! I've seen it in a shop, and it's fit for a queen! It says so on it—it's all blue and gold! And it's somethin' to wear. I've got all that money, just waitin'—you know—oh, won't you look royalistically beautiful!"

"Oh, Bubbles, dear—"

But Jem appealed to her. "Please may the Derrys' insignificant parents come too, to the breakfast?"

She laughed. "We'll find a seat for them somewhere in consideration of their Derrys!"

Bubbles had skipped off to Boyne.

Helen stooped to Bunny. Bunny turned his intent gaze from Boyne to her. "Poo-ah wounded soljah," he murmured gravely. "Bun be wounded too one day, eh?"

"Bunny," she whispered, "dear little Bunny!"

He pointed a small finger at the brougham.

"Come ride?" he queried.

"Not now, Bunny," she was looking at him very softly; "another time."

"Ally right, de-ah."

She glanced at Boyne, then looked at Pauline, who, oddly quiet, was watching her.

Pauline nodded.

"Bubbles, open the door of the brougham."

Bubbles flew to obey.

"Enter, oh Queen-wife, and her intendant swain!"

At the door Helen turned and caught Pauline's hand.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye." Pauline's dark little face worked. She gave a little laugh.

"Their gloves — only ten and sixpence the half-dozen pairs."

"Good-bye, Derrys! Another kiss, you Cherub. You too, Peggy? Good-bye — Lord Belmain, keep Bunny from the horses' hoofs."

"Derrys," Jem's voice broke in, "we'll do something to celebrate the occasion. We'll charter two hansoms and drive about London!"

There was a chorus of delight.

The brougham started.

Helen leant from the window.

"Oh, Bubbles! Oh, he has thrown his shoe after us — and it has lodged in a mud heap. He is capering about on one foot."

She waved her hand as the brougham turned the corner, then drew her head in.

She glanced at Boyne. He looked white and tired. She slipped her hand from her muff, and rested it against his brow.

"There is a bad little tired line there," she said softly.

He was silent. She took her hand away.

"There's another line, Helen — and another — they're all over my forehead," he suggested.

She laughed.

He captured her hand and held it.

"I want to give you something," he said presently, fumbling with his right hand in his coat pocket. "I've bullied a man's life out of him to have it made in time —" he handed her a small box.

"Is it a present? For me?"

He laughed at her bright eyes.

"Greedy!"

She opened the little box. In a nest of pale blue satin glimmered a slender gold chain, and hanging as a pendant was a beautiful little diamond pine cone.

"Oh!" she drew a quick little breath. She held it to the light, down in the shade — the diamonds sent out brilliant points of light.

"It's beautiful," she said simply. She turned to him. "In all the world," she said softly, "you couldn't have thought of anything I should love so well."

"Helen, you're beautiful to give things to! I shall want to give you things all the time, my Lady of the Pines."

"I — I have that other poor little pine cone still," she whispered, and she put out her hand to him with a nervous little gesture.

His strong clasp made her laugh at herself.

"That was such a terrible day." She shivered. "I — I —"

"What is it, Helen?"

She shook her head.

He waited.

"I — was so — horrid," she whispered. "It was because I — cared so — I was mean, petty — afraid you would see —"

He stopped her.

"Helen, I won't have it," he said.

The brougham rolled into Paddington Station; he gave a tender little laugh. "You petty! You mean! Oh, my Lady of the Pines, you don't know how absurd it sounds!"

Charlie Belmain's man, lent for the time being, awaited them. He managed everything beautifully, down to ensuring them a compartment to themselves.

They did not speak much on the journey. Boyne did not sleep, though his nurse ordered him to try.

"I won't shut my eyes. It's asking too much of mortal nature, Helen."

"I don't see that the landscape is so *very* enthralling," she said staidly.

"No; it's very unfair, is n't it? Think what you have to look at, and what I have to look at."

"Helen, will you go on with your novel now?"

"I shall be too busy dosing you. Nurses should n't write novels."

"My nurse should. I won't have her spoken of as if she's only like other nurses. You will go on with it now, Helen?" his tone was anxious; "it opened so splendidly."

Her eyes kindled, glowed.

"Yes," she said simply.

He read her face; then looked away.

"You make me feel afraid," he said in a low voice.

"That I shall rise to the pinnacle of addressing fellow-authors at meetings? Or of writing scathing articles about the awful iniquities of that wicked Upper Ten?"

He moved restlessly — flung aside his rug.

"I want to be strong. I want to make up to you for all those months you lived in that garret — and I never knew how bad things were. I want to make up to you for all your life, Helen — for everything. I must be able to do it, if I give my whole life to it."

"I — I think you can," she whispered, and gently she replaced the rug.

"Helen, you'll like the queer old house we're going to. I stayed there once, years ago. I believe I've fairly turned poor old Hannock out. I'm sure he was n't going abroad till I wrote and asked him if he could tell me of some place in the neighbourhood."

"You wanted to go there specially because it's so pretty?"



"Yes."

But when at the end of their journey they drove up the drive, she understood suddenly. For strong, fresh, fragrant, wafted to them on the breeze, there came the scent of the pines. She gave a little cry, leaned out, drank it in.

"Oh," she turned to him, radiant, joyous, "how you spoil me!"

"I'm going to spoil you all my life, my Lady of the Pines. I'm going to spoil you and spoil you, till I make up for all the years you have n't been spoiled!"

Down the wide old shallow stairs she came slowly, lingering with an odd shyness. In and out the shadows cast by the old lamp in the hall, she came, a beautiful figure — all white and gold.

Downstairs in the library Boyne was waiting for her. She had settled him on the lounge, arranged his pillows, patted him into comfort. He was very tired. Presently they were to have a cosy dinner — just they two. She paused a moment — it was all so wonderful.

She came on slowly down the stairs, very radiant, very lovely, in the dimness of the old house.

At the foot, in the doorway of the library, Boyne stood, watching her approach.

Her eyes were laden with dreams, looking out before her. Softly she drew near — the train of her gown winding, a long white and gold shimmer, behind her. She did not see him till she stood on the lowest stair. Then she caught sight of him standing there, the light from the lamp on his face. Her eyes met his — the lovely pink flooded her face — she stood hesitating.

He came forward and gave her his arm.

"My beautiful *édition de luxe*," he murmured.

"You promised to stay on the lounge," she reproached him.

"I came to look for you — I could n't wait any longer. I did n't expect — quite — this, Helen."

They had entered the beautiful old library; the dim light from the shaded lamp fell softly on rare bindings; gleams of gold glittered here and there in the gloom of the walls.

"They are none so beautiful as my *édition de luxe*," he said.

She laughed softly.

"Don't! I feel as if they will all come out of the book-cases to refute such sacrilege." She put her hands gently on his shoulders, and pressed him back into the lounge.

"Sit down."

"I want to look at the pine cone against your throat, Helen."

She tilted her pretty chin. "Is n't it charming?"

He touched her white throat. "Very charming — beautiful, Helen."

"Do sit down."

"I'm not tired. I defy any one to be tired, with you to look at."

She knelt down on the rug before the fire. All round the oak-panelled walls she shone palely amidst the firelight — gleams of pale gold and white amongst the ruddy hues of the fire.

"Helen, do you remember your pine-hydro?"

"Yes; and the pines are all round the house."

"And their Lady is inside the house — here — with me. You did n't know I was to be your only patient, did you?"

She stretched out her hands to the fire.

"I may have other patients," demurely.

"No, you won't;" he bent forward and took her hands into his, and kissed them, one after the other. "Poor little hands, how thin they've grown. I had to get such a tiny ring. They say opals are unlucky, Helen."

"I don't mind. I'm not afraid of anything — now — I love opals. I'll never be afraid, so long as — as I have you," she ended in a whisper.

He drew her beautiful head to his shoulder. "Boyne — guardin' — you — eh?" he said, with a queer little laugh.

"Will he do as well as Bunny, Helen?"

"Perhaps."

"Helen, I love this edition the best of all."

"And this morning you loved the grey edition best of all!"

"I don't care," unabashed. "I know how it is."

"Well?"

"It's the edition that has been incorporated with the old Classical Dictionary that beats all the others, Helen."

"Is n't it rather conceited?" with a little low laugh.

"I expect so. Can you wonder? Once there was a plain old heavy Classical Dictionary — very ordinary — very unattractive — and the publishers — what was their name, Helen?"

"Messrs. Love and Joy —" she put in softly.

"Yes, that was it. Well, Messrs. Love and Joy suddenly — it was very suddenly, was n't it? — published a new edition of that Classical Dictionary, and with it, — incorporated with it, — they had bound a Cyclopædia — a beautiful, wonderful Cyclopædia. Can you wonder if the old Dictionary went off his head a bit? Because, you see, there's no other Cyclopædia in all the world that's the least bit like that slim Etiquette Cyclopædia. And once he had thought she was so far beyond him. He thought so still — he knew it was most incongruous — only, you see, Messrs. Love and Joy made the mistake of not thinking so."

"And the Cyclopædia," her low voice pursued, "made the mistake too. Only she went further, and thought she was just nothing at all, just an ordinary foolish sort of Cyclopædia, till that Classical Dictionary was bound with her, and then she felt so brave and grand —"

"Do you know," she said softly, "this edition has a good many rules added to it that the other editions never had."

"Are they rules about married life, Helen?"

She blushed and nodded.

"All about the husband having to do what he is ordered by — by his — wife — take all the beef-tea and food she orders him —"

"And the etiquette of the way she is to do that ordering?"

She laughed.

"Ah, that is marked 'private.'"

There was a pause.

The wind outside had risen; it whispered amongst the pine-trees; one came tapping at the window. He held her closer.

## MESSRS. LOVE AND JOY

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"They want their Lady," he whispered; "their beautiful white and gold lady — but I want her too — Helen, tell me some more about those new etiquette rules."

She shook her head dreamily.

"After all, there is only one — just one big rule."

He touched her hair softly.

"Look at me, Helen; tell it me, dear."

She knelt beside him, the folds of her gown glimmering and shadowing along the rug. She raised her head, her eyes met his.

With a little tremulous laugh she said, so low that he had to bend his head to hear, "Rules I — II — III — IV — V — to a hundred — are all comprised in this —" she stopped.

"Yes, Helen?"

"It is etiquette that the wife should make the husband — happy!"

THE END





**This book is under no circumstances to be  
taken from the Building**

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